

# Epley returns to Vision Care Clinic

DAVID GOLBITZ  
The Nonpareil

When optometrist Robyn Epley announced that she was ready to return to Vision Care Clinic, the eye care provider welcomed her not only with open arms but a new office as well.

"It's like my birthday and Christmas for the next 10 years all at the same time," Epley said at a ribbon cutting ceremony for her office at the corner of Second Avenue and South 29th Street, just south of West Broadway in Council Bluffs.

Epley had briefly worked for Vision Care Clinic when she and her husband Cole first moved to Council Bluffs in 2013. But when her main practice hired her on full time, she wasn't able to fill in at Vision Care anymore.

When Epley decided to leave that practice in 2022, she was unable to work in Council Bluffs for one year due to a noncompete clause, so she filled in at other Vision Care Clinic locations until she could return.

"And then, October 1st, my noncompete clause was up, so then it was time to come back," Epley told The Nonpareil.

"It's been a whirlwind to say the least," Vision Care Clinic Chief Operating Officer Jay Mendlik said at the ribbon cutting.

In anticipation of her return, the renovation of the property at 200 S. 29th St. began on June 1, with a goal of having the space



DAVID GOLBITZ PHOTOS, THE NONPAREIL

Surrounded by CB Ambassadors, Council Bluffs Area Chamber of Commerce interim President and CEO Barry Cleaveland, left, presents a plaque commemorating the opening of a new Vision Care Clinic to optometrist Robyn Epley on Thursday, Nov. 30, 2023.

ready for Epley by Oct. 2, Mendlik said.

"It's been a pleasure to get her to this point," Mendlik said. "Now it's time for me to back out and let her do her thing."

The location might be familiar to a number of Council Bluffs residents who, like Mayor Matt Walsh, who used to get his teeth cleaned there.

"This is my former dental clinic, so I feel right at home," Walsh said.

Epley also happens to be Walsh's eye doctor.

"For a year I've been saying, 'When (will you be able to work in Council Bluffs)? When?'" Walsh said. "We're glad to have you back in business. I will be calling for an

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appointment."

The building might also look familiar to film nerds — it was used as the set for an abortion clinic in Omaha native Alexander Payne's 1996 directorial debut, "Citizen Ruth."

Epley is thrilled to be back with Vision Care Clinic and to have a brand new office.

"It feels like it's full circle," Epley said. "For me to start working with Vision Care Clinic when I first moved to town, and now



Optometrist Robyn Epley, right, holding scissors, gets ready to cut the ribbon for her new Vision Care Clinic office at 200 S. 29th St. in Council Bluffs on Thursday, Nov. 30, 2023.

coming back. It's just a wonderful group of people, wonderful doctors, staff. It's a great group to be a part of. I'm very thankful that they welcomed me back."

Epley is originally from South Dakota. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and graduated summa cum laude from Southern College of Optometry in Memphis. She and her husband, a native of Walnut, decided after

school to return to the Midwest and made Council Bluffs their home.

"Council Bluffs is very special to me," Epley said. "When we had a job opportunity after school to come back to Iowa, we both knew we wanted to live in the Midwest and Council Bluffs has just become our hometown. And we're very proud of Council Bluffs, and we're very happy to be here. I'm happy to be back in town."

# Weary business travelers to get place to call home

DAVID GOLBITZ  
The Nonpareil

Business travelers who come to work in the Omaha metropolitan area on their company's dime will soon have a new accommodation option for their long-term assignments.

In anticipation of their impending opening, developers Scott Porter and Doug Reisz held a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Wednesday for their new corporate housing development, Black Squirrel Flats.

"It is the first and only 100% corporate housing facility in the entire Omaha metro, and what makes this special is its location," Porter said. "We're minutes away from the airport, the interstate, the zoo, great restaurants ... location is really what sells this property."

Black Squirrel Flats, located at 1120 S. 34th St., just south of 11th Avenue, is comprised of 20 identical townhomes with all of the amenities one would expect at a hotel,

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but spread out over two floors and 1,080 square feet.

Each unit comes fully furnished, with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen, a cozy living room with custom-made chairs and a flat screen television, a washer and dryer, and a one-car garage.

Rent is \$3,000 per month, or "\$100 a day for a minimum of 30 days," as Reisz puts it.

"You can't get a hotel room for \$100 a day," he said.

Utilities and Wi-Fi are included in the cost, and there is an on-site resident-only gym facility.

When spring rolls around, there will also be a private green space at the far end of the development with a fire pit, outdoor grill and seating.

The development will have a security gate, cameras, and even a license plate reader. Entry and exit will be accomplished via an app that guests will have to download called Buildium.

There is a \$75 application fee and a \$2,000 deposit. Applicants must have a credit score of 640 or higher and earn at least two and a half times the rent, or \$7,500 a month.

If all goes well, Porter and Reisz are already planning another corporate housing development right next door — an empty lot to the west of the current property.

Black Squirrel Flats is accepting rental applications. More information can be found at blacksquirrelflats.com.

Developers Scott Porter, left, and Doug Reisz prepare to cut the ribbon commemorating their new long-term corporate housing development, Black Squirrel Flats, on Wednesday, Dec. 6, 2023.

DAVID GOLBITZ, THE NONPAREIL



# City supports Acadia Healthcare in making tax credit application

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The City of Council Bluffs will help Acadia Healthcare seek economic development incentives for its proposed behavioral health hospital.

The Council Bluffs City Council voted Nov. 27 to approve a joint application between the city and Acadia to the Iowa Economic Development Agency for financial assistance for the health care company's project at the southwest corner of South 24th Street and Richard Downing Avenue.

Under the state's Targeted Jobs Withholding Tax Credit pilot program, a company can receive a rebate of up to 3% of its payroll withholding taxes — matched by the city — for up to 10 years. The withheld funds would be directed to the project budget on a quarterly basis.

To qualify, the company must create at least 10 jobs at or above the city's hourly wage threshold. For Council Bluffs, that threshold is set at \$26.35 an hour for fiscal year 2024.

In the application, Acadia estimates that the new facility will have 144 full time positions, of which 54 would qualify for the tax credit. Those jobs have an estimated wage of \$49.12 per hour, or \$102,169 annually.

The city is also utilizing its urban revitalization property tax incentive program for the new hospital, which allows the owner to have their taxes abated or exempted on a new development for a period of time.

"This means you always pay taxes on your 'base valuation amount' or how much your assessed value was prior to completing the new project," Council Bluffs Community Development Director Courtney Harter said in an email.

Using the Acadia hospital as an



An artist's rendering shows the front of the 96-bed behavioral health hospital in Council Bluffs.



An artist's rendering shows an aerial view of the new behavioral health hospital.

example, Harter said that the company's current assessed valuation, before any construction began, is

\$30,400.

"When they complete the proposed \$60 million project their

assessed value will increase to \$60,030,400," Harter said. "They will always have to pay the taxes

that are due each year on the \$30,400, but can choose between two abatement schedules for the \$60 million, or what we call the 'increment created.'"

The tax abatement is only available for the construction of the hospital, not the property itself, which means that if the property value goes up, Acadia will have to pay taxes on that new valuation, Harter said.

One of the two abatement schedules that Acadia gets to choose from is a three-year 100% abatement on the increment created — anticipated to be \$60 million — meaning the company would not have to pay taxes on that portion of its tax bill for three years.

The other abatement schedule is a 10-year sliding scale, where in the first year the company doesn't have to pay taxes on 80% of the increment created, then 70% in the second year, 60% in the third year, 50% in the fourth year, 40% in both the fifth and sixth years, 30% in the seventh and eighth years, and 20% in the ninth and 10th years.

Methodist Jennie Edmundson Hospital and Acadia Healthcare announced plans for the state-of-the-art behavioral health care facility in July. The new hospital will include 24 inpatient beds for children and adolescents, and it will also offer intensive outpatient services.

The 82,799-square-foot hospital would have 169 parking stalls and available space for future expansion. Construction is planned to start in March with completion in August 2025.

The hospital is expected to open in 2026 and will operate as a partnership between Jennie Ed and Acadia.

More information is available at bluffsbehavioralhealth.com. A groundbreaking ceremony has yet to be announced.