

Client Highlight: Seattle Indian Health Board's Acquisition of a Crucial Rehabilitation Facility

DEI & Pro Bono
September 6, 2023
Foster Garvey Newsroom

Since 2016, Foster Garvey has represented [Seattle Indian Health Board](#) (SIHB) with a range of legal services. Recently, a Foster Garvey team partnered with this client in its purchase of a facility on Vashon Island, Washington, to serve as the future home of the Thunderbird Treatment Center.

SIHB is a Seattle-based community health center providing health and human services to patients, while specializing in the care of Native people. It is a recognized leader in the promotion of health improvement for urban American Indians and Alaska Natives, locally and nationally.

Through advocacy, outreach, education and partnerships with tribes, communities and government officials, SIHB also ensures Native voices are heard and honored in matters of policies and funding that impact the health of Native people.

The Thunderbird Treatment Center

For more than three decades, SIHB operated the Thunderbird Treatment Center, one of the Puget Sound region's leading centers for treating substance use disorders.

With its extensive programs geared to Alaska Native and American Indian patients, as well as non-Natives, Thunderbird became a nationally recognized facility. Thunderbird was one of just a handful of adult substance abuse treatment centers in the Pacific Northwest that offered services to urban Indians, with a focus on providing culturally appropriate treatment using a 45-day intensive program model.

Contact

Chelsea J. Glynn
Bryan Helfer
Steven R. Peltin

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By 2020, Thunderbird's 64 in-patient treatment beds represented almost 20 percent of all state-licensed in-patient treatment beds in Seattle.

A Bittersweet Farewell for Thunderbird

Located in Seattle's Rainier Beach neighborhood, the original building in which Thunderbird was housed dated back to 1926, sitting on a property that once served as a refuge for unwed mothers. Though steeped in history, the near century-old building began showing its age and became unsuitable for the needs of today's patients.

While Thunderbird was a fixture in the community for more than 30 years, SIHB concluded that the condition and limited size of the Rainier Beach facility hindered its ability to adequately serve *relatives* – the term the organization uses to refer to patients.

In February 2020, SIHB announced its difficult decision to close the revered but aging facility, pledging to locate a new facility where it could enhance and expand in-patient services.

Finding a New Thunderbird

The search was on. SIHB recognized that it needed to expand into a more modern facility with a greater capacity to be able to better serve the current and future needs of the community. SIHB wished to expand from a 65-bed to a 92-bed facility.

"Members of our urban Indian community and tribal partners have expressed the need for in-patient care that also provides services for pregnant women, women with children, individuals with mental health needs, and individuals with substance use disorder needs," SIHB CEO Esther Lucero said in 2020.

During its extensive hunt for a new site, SIHB worked closely with federal, state and local officials, including U.S. Representative Pramila Jayapal, Washington Senator Patty Murray, and King County Council member Joe McDermott.

In April 2023 – three years after Thunderbird's closing – SIHB announced that it had located a site on Vashon Island, Washington, for the new substance abuse treatment center. The property, acquired from senior living operator Transforming Age, was the former home of Vashon Community Care, a long-term care facility.

Foster Garvey's Role in the Transaction

With a team of real estate, land use, construction and tax attorneys, Foster Garvey assisted SIHB with all matters related to the acquisition, including due diligence, purchase-sale negotiations, corporate entity formation, obtaining qualifications for nonprofit status, and conducting all communications with Transforming Age to effectuate the purchase and sale of

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the property.

The firm continues to work with SIHB in public finance matters, such as the application of federal and state grants, to aid in the buildout of the new facility and enhance future patient care.

The team assisting SIHB with this acquisition included attorneys and staff from Foster Garvey's Seattle and Portland offices, including [Steve Peltin](#), [Bryan Helfer](#), [Chelsea Glynn](#), [Steven Nofziger](#), [Kelly Meltzer](#), [Peter Evalds](#) and [Poonam Bora](#).

Sharing Native Cultural Practices With a Focus on Inclusivity

With this new facility, those seeking recovery from addiction will have access to holistic healing and support, with care rooted in Native cultural practices, as well as cutting-edge therapeutic programs.

While traditional Indian medicine will be a central aspect of the services at the new facility, SIHB's caring professionals will serve all people, including non-Indigenous patients, using various Native techniques that include sunrise ceremonies, talking circles and traditional drumming.

"We recognize we're all related and that everybody can benefit from that way of healing," Lucero commented.

The new facility, which is slated to open by the end of 2024, will dedicate ten of its 92 beds to patients who are pregnant or are the parents of young children, offering access to daycare and other programs in the facility during their parents' treatment.

For many years, the Thunderbird Treatment Center in Rainier Beach shined as a beacon of hope for those seeking recovery from addiction. Given Thunderbird's indelible presence in the community, SIHB intends to give that same name to this new Vashon Island facility.

Upon completion of the upgrades at the new facility, SIHB will again welcome and serve *relatives* from the community who are seeking substance abuse treatment, carrying on the Thunderbird legacy.

Foster Garvey's Continued Support of SIHB

The firm is proud to support SIHB in its mission to provide culturally attuned healthcare and to lead the way in the promotion of health improvement for urban American Indians and Alaska Natives.

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Foster Garvey serves as SIHB's primary law firm, assisting the organization in such areas as employment, Board governance, real estate and land use, Native housing, employee benefits, commercial, intellectual property, and HIPAA and other health care matters.