

Chicopee Regi

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May 7, 2021 | Vol. 23, No. 8 | FREE

COMMUNITY

Chicopee's regional vaccine site a reality

By Dalton Zbierski
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CHICOPEE – Four neighboring communities celebrated together on April 28, as a regional vaccination site began operating out of the Castle of Knights in Chicopee, on Memorial Drive. The opening served as a tremendous accomplishment for all involved.

The clinic will administer state-allotted doses of the Moderna vaccine to residents from Chicopee, Granby, Holyoke and South Hadley, and has the capacity to administer 800 shots a day.

After several weeks of discussions, the Department of Public Health approved the regional vaccination site at the Castle of Knights in late March.

Doses, however, were slow to follow. The operation remained uncertain until an opening date was announced in mid-April.

Weeks of waiting culminated in the April 28 opening, which drove Chicopee Health Director Lisa Sanders to tears.

"I'm so excited today. I'm used to being at this podium and telling you guys all the active cases we have, but it's so



TURLEY PUBLICATIONS STAFF PHOTO BY DALTON ZBIERSKI

Holyoke Community College nursing students Shauna Martinez, Matthew Tetreault, Veronica Machuca, Edward Brewer prepare for the first day of the regional vaccination clinic that is operating at the Castle of Knights in Chicopee.

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good to finally tell you that we have vaccines in the city. It's been so long, and I'm just so happy. Let's fill up these slots and let's just crush COVID," said Sanders.

Chicopee Mayor John Vieau urged residents to get vaccinated and credited the first responders and medical professionals, who make the clinic possible.

Referencing the rising availability of COVID-19 testing and vaccines, Vieau expressed his belief that the state is making strong progress. Last Thursday, he emphasized the magnitude of the clinic's opening.

"I have some scripted things that I'm not going to use; it's not about being scripted today. It's about getting the message out there. We've made vaccines available, and that was our goal," said Vieau.

A number of speakers took to the podium at the Castle of the Knights on April 28. Among them was Hampden County Sheriff Nick Cocchi, who praised all involved in manning the clinic.

"The heroes that are in this room today are not behind the podium. They're out in front of the podium. I want to thank each and every one of you for stepping up and doing the work that you do," said Cocchi.

Cocchi acknowledged that vaccinations are controversial. Nonetheless, he encouraged residents to book an appointment, even if only for peace of mind.

"One vaccine at a time will allow us to open up this commonwealth and, then, that person, that family or that individual



Holyoke Community College nursing students Brittany Lord, Christine Briggs and Yamaira Bejesus came out to work the first day of the Chicopee regional vaccination clinic.

can feel confident about moving forward and doing so in a very safe and productive way," said Cocchi.

Interim Holyoke Mayor Terence Murphy took to the microphone as well, thanking the students from Holyoke Community College's nursing program, who are working the clinic. Murphy also delivered an important message to employees throughout the region.

"Without mandating, I would like to challenge employers to give your em-



TURLEY PUBLICATIONS STAFF PHOTOS BY DALTON ZBIERSKI After months of waiting, vaccines are available at the Castle of Knights in Chicopee.

ployees, especially those that are on low wages and can't afford to give up a couple of hours in order to get vaccinated; to give them those hours with pay, which in the long run will make your business more successful and will allow the community to get together," said Murphy.

South Hadley Emergency Management/Health Director Sharon Hart was on-hand to witness the opening on April 28; she commended the teamwork that led to the establishment of the regional clinic.



Lisa Sanders, Chicopee's Health Director, was moved to tears during the opening of the regional vaccination site in the city.

"This is amazing; the efforts they've put in to put this clinic together. Not only their efforts; they reached out to their neighbors, and it's a collaborative effort. They're our neighbors; they opened their arms, and we're rolling up our sleeves," said Hart.

One can schedule an appointment at the regional vaccination site by visiting [Mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine](https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine).

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Mayor John Vieau addresses the media at the Castle of Knights on April 28, as a regional vaccination clinic opens to residents.



Alongside a mix of municipal and state officials, Chicopee Mayor John Vieau offers a round of applause for the healthcare workers and first responders, who are manning Chicopee's regional vaccination site.