

By NANCY KLETECKA • Southwest Medical Center

Originally from the small country of Belize in Central America, Southwest Medical Center's newest physician, Dr. Derrick Mena, is glad to now be in Liberal.

"I visited Liberal a year ago for a weekend and fell in love with the community," he said. "Everyone is friendly here, and it seems like a nice place to raise a family."

Mena is the second hospitalist to be added to the staff at SWMC, joining Dr. Vicente Florida who also came to SWMC this year. Mena and his wife, Tanya, do not have children at this time; however, should they decide to expand their family in the future, Liberal seemed to be the right choice.

"I decided, after living many years in a bigger city, I wanted to come here," he said. "I didn't want to raise children in a big city."

I am originally from Belize (below Mexico and next to Guatamala), and it has a population of only 320,000 in the entire country, so I feel more at ease in a smaller community."

Mena, who is fluent in Spanish, says one of the things he brings to the table for SWMC is that he "understands the Latino culture,"

something he feels is important to assist with the demographics of the patients needing healthcare in this area. All of his patients can expect him to be "friendly and easy going," as well as to always "give his best to make sure they get the best treatment while they are a patient at SWMC."

Mena and his wife most recently lived in New York City, where he finished up his residency at Woodhull Medical Center in Brooklyn.

Prior to his three-year stint in New York, he completed his graduate work and medical school in Guatamala City at the Universidad Francisco Marroquin.

Mena has known he wanted to practice medicine since a young age.

“When I was young, I liked to fix things, but I was never too good with my hands – just my brains,” he said with a smile. “I soon realized that medicine was the field I wanted to go into – so I could make people healthy.”

The first to go into medicine in his family, Mena did not take long to determine which field of medicine he would call his own.

“I wanted to be a hospitalist, because I prefer to treat illnesses that are more severe and that need to be taken care of in a hospital setting,” he explained, “Because once you give a patient treatment – you will see results. You get the reward of knowing that you have been able to help someone. When you treat outpatients, you don’t really get to see that right away because you prescribe a treatment to a patient and if they get well, they won’t be back until they are sick again. In the hospital setting, you can see the improvement as it happens.”

Mena enjoys softball and soccer and would like to learn to play golf; however, his time for “extracurricular” activities will be limited for awhile.

“Right now, I am working on my MBA in health care management, so I really won’t have much time for anything else right now,” he said.

His wife, Tanya, has a background in tourism. She has a master's degree in environmental sustainable development.

"She also likes to do volunteer work," Mena said.

He is very impressed with SWMC.

"SWMC is a very modern facility that has much of the same technology found at the major hospitals in New York," he said. "People should know that the treatment they will get here is comparable to that they can get anywhere else in the world. It makes no sense to go somewhere else when you can get treatment right here at home. And don't forget, the people are more friendly here."