

Group creating a community clinic

Goal is to begin offering health services in 2007

BY MARK GWIN
THE SMITHVILLE TIMES
Thursday March 23, 2006

It began in a small room of First' United Methodist Church with an idea. And just as important as the idea were the dedicated individuals behind it.

One year later, the goal of a Smithville Community Clinic is rapidly moving from possibility to fruition.

The group of citizens spearheading the project first met a year ago during a local meeting of the First United Methodist Church's Amos Commission. Taking as their guide the passage "Let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream (Amos 5:24)," the commission works to affect social and political change.

Focusing on the fact that approximately 1 in 5 Texas children is Uninsured, the group decided to concentrate on children's health issues and determine what services they could provide. "As we began researching, we learned that to be a federally-qualified health center. (which makes it possible to receive federal finding) we would, need to serve the entire community," said K-Lee Starland, who' is spearheading the project. "It was a natural transition to offer health care for the whole family."

The group has had plenty of community support and has also found tremendous guidance and assistance in negotiating the paperwork involved from other community clinics across the state, said Jim Bailey, chairman of the clinic board.

"Pete Perialas of Lone' Star Circle of Care and others have really helped. us figure out how to move forward in our goal," said Bailey.

The group received state approval to proceed and will now pursue non-profit status in their pursuit to open their doors.

The clinic will be an independent non-profit, though Bailey noted that the First United Methodist has continued to be very supportive.

"Dr. Karen Boehk and the congregation have been very supportive of our efforts in this project," said Bailey. "But this clinic is about the entire community, and we are hoping for support from everyone.

“With one in every four people In Texas uninsured, we could be pretty busy.”
K-LEE STARLAND,
SMITHVILLE COMMUNITY CLINIC

The group will be hosting an informational meeting April 6 beginning at 5:30 p.m. in .the Smithville Recreation Center to solicit” community input and support.

During the meeting, there will be a. panel discussion with a question-and-answer period as well as a survey to determine what services are needed by the community.

“We hope to open our doors with basic health and dental care but would like to expand our offerings as possible,” said Starland.

The group is making a concerted effort to cross social, economic and language barriers with the clinic.

The services will be available to anyone in the community, and pay will be on a sliding-scale basis. The clinic intends to offer health care classes that, when attended, can earn credits for "purchasing" health care at the clinic.

There will also be translators on hand at both the community meeting and at the clinic itself.

"We want to offer access to health care to the citizens of Smithville and everyone else in the area," said Bailey. "Hopefully this can help (Smithville) hospital out because people will address their health issues early rather than waiting till it becomes an emergency situation."

"With one in every four people in Texas uninsured, we could be pretty busy," said Starland.

Starland also said that she believes the clinic may be an affordable option for small businesses in town. "While it's hard for a business to offer health insurance to their employees, by supporting the community clinic they would be helping create a place where their employees could receive affordable medical care," she said.

A year into the project, Starland and Bailey said they are very happy with how quickly the project has progressed.

"It's just been wonderful. We have pretty much asked for what we want and it is showing up at our door," said Starland.

The next step in the project will be the community meeting April 6.

"We'll get everybody to show up because of the free dinner," said Starland with a laugh. Childcare and transportation will also be available for those who need it. For more information call 439-9767.

