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PEACE, GOOD WILL TO ALL MEN

Hudson River Healthcare in Amenia Part of a Regional Network; Expansion Planned

By Antonia Shoumatoff

“Healthcare is a right and not a privilege. When you talk about healthy communities and healthy families you need access to primary and preventive services for the most underserved and the most vulnerable. Many times people see the underprivileged as less than. Health services should be provided with the proper dignity and respect for all people. And indeed we can all be classified as vulnerable.” Jeanette Phillips, Co-Founder and Exec. VP Hudson River Healthcare

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world.

Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Margaret Mead

Hudson River Healthcare (HRHC), a network of 16 primary care health centers located in some of the most underserved and low-income areas of Westchester and the Hudson Valley, provides affordable and humane health services for people throughout the five towns of the Harlem Valley. The story of how this came about exemplifies how community advocates can catalyze change in healthcare in an underserved area.

In 1971, one of the Founding Mothers of HRHC, Mary Woods, had to change buses four times and travel over two hours from Peekskill to Valhalla with her large brood of children to get healthcare because Grasslands Hospital in Valhalla was the only place where care for the indigent was provided. The complicated series of buses took so long that she missed her connecting bus on the way home and her kids were left stranded, crying and hungry in the middle of Ossining.

The next day she was talking to some friends around her kitchen table and told them that this did not make sense and that there should be healthcare for the underprivileged in their own community in Peekskill. The Executive Director of her local Community Action Program told her that she would have to do a needs assessment survey. She and her friends went door to door and found out that healthcare, housing and education were indeed the biggest need in their area.

They called together a community meeting at the Methodist Church on Main St. in Peekskill and over 200 people showed up from local churches, synagogues, charities as well as poor families. Willy May Jackson, another one of the Founding Mothers, a mother of 12, spoke eloquently of what the concerns of the people were. Her story moved the Commissioner of Health of Westchester, Dr. Phyllis Koteen and the Director of the Medical College of Grasslands to help the Founding Mothers to write a grant for a regional medical program. They received \$285,000 in start-up funding.

Jeanette Phillips is the last founding mother who is still involved in HRHC and she serves as Executive Vice President. She explained that President Nixon rescinded and impounded all discretionary domestic grant funding after they got their grant and the group filed a class action suit. They also marched on Washington D.C. as part of the National Mobilization Day. They got their funding back.

In 1975 the four Founding Mothers finally were able to open their doors for what was then called the Peekskill Ambulatory Healthcare Center with a staff of twelve, serving all the needy families in the community in what was formerly the Big Scott Department Store on Main St. They were able to get in-kind services from the Westchester County Health Department, Hudson Valley Mental Health and Coordinated Human Services and soon were offering complete primary care and family planning services.

They became part of a network with three other community centers, including the Mount Vernon and Greenburgh Neighborhood Health Centers and Ossining Open Door in order to receive federal funding. Pretty soon they were designated as their own unique “medically undisturbed area” (a federal designation for medically fundable areas) and were able to get



LEFT TO RIGHT: Willie Mae Jackson, Pearl Woods, Jennette Phillips, Mary Woods, the “founding mothers” of Hudson Valley Healthcare. Photo submitted.

federal funding on their own.

In the mid-eighties they expanded into Beacon in Dutchess County. The Emergency Room at St. Francis Hospital had closed and many people who had depended on the E.R. for episodic primary care were left with no healthcare. The New York State Commissioner of Health asked the group to discuss the possibility of opening a healthcare center in Beacon. The meeting was held at the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AME Zion) where Founding Mother, Jeanette Phillips, served as a newly ordained minister with her husband. Jeanette was also the first Chairman of what became Hudson River Healthcare. She is now the last of the four Founding Mothers to be involved in the health care center.

Their certificate to operate in Beacon enabled them to open two more sites in Poughkeepsie, at Hamilton Avenue Family Partnership and St. Francis Hospital. They were asked to facilitate and expand an existing Dutchess County migrant farm worker healthcare program. Over the next few years they expanded into 16 primary care facilities on both sides of the Hudson River and in Westchester. So what started with four African American women sitting around a kitchen table was having a major impact on the region.

Meanwhile, in the Harlem Valley, a group practice called Foothills Family Practice organized in 1990 with three doctors, including Dr. Robert Dweck, Dr. William Elman and Dr. Anna Timell in Amenia was losing money because they were serving so many poor people in the Harlem Valley. Medicaid would only re-imburse them \$12 a visit. By 1996 they knew they could not effectively continue to offer services to the underprivileged of the area without more financial help. Sharon Hospital was in the midst of red ink as well and could not longer afford to support them. The hospital was being acquired by a for-profit called Essent which changed the financial structure.

The group was relieved when the Hudson River Healthcare system offered them their umbrella under which to operate because they knew this would help them to better serve their underprivileged patient population. Private donors as well as the Berkshire Taconic Foundation helped tide over the center until HRHC could start raising funds for them.

The HRHC Amenia group felt strongly about advocating for outreach, preventive medicine, diet, childhood nutrition, exercise and lifestyle changes to get the underprivileged to take more responsibility for their health. Their Mission Statement is:

“To increase access to comprehensive and preventive health care and to improve the health of our community, especially the underserved and vulnerable.”

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Community Services Help Those in Need

By Amy Belotti

Food pantries and their related service centers are more and more becoming the lifeline for families and individuals in distress as the effect of this economic slowdown courses through the economy. Not only do we have the food pantries, but we also have a corps of willing volunteers to help run them.

The Lunch Box at 29 North Hamilton Street in Poughkeepsie is a soup kitchen that serves hot meals run through Dutchess Outreach, open weekly from Sunday to Friday.

Once a month, volunteers at Grace Church in Millbrook gather to cook food and serve it to patrons of the Lunch Box. Many other volunteers in the Dutchess County area do the same.

In addition to the Lunch Box, Dutchess Outreach has a food pantry, a Children’s Clothes Closet, a GIFTS (Giving Individuals Food for the Soul) program, and emergency services. Dutchess Outreach was established in 1974 to help those with both temporary and long term needs. The organization is being weighed down like many other Dutchess County services.

The United Way ceased to fund the Lunch Box in 2009 to focus its support on the Hudson Valley Food Bank. The Lunch Box has operated in 2009 thanks to private contributors who responded to a newsletter asking for support. Church groups provide meals as well. The Lunch Box delivers one hot meal per day, and offers dinner eight to nine times per month. Executive Director Brian Riddell reports that Dutchess Outreach has covered most of the funds for The Lunch Box’s upcoming fiscal year, but further contributions will

better solidify the budget.

Closer to the Millbrook area is the Dutchess County Community Action Agency, or DCCAP, located in Dover. The agency, a unit of county government, is supported by the State’s Division of Community Service Programs, Dutchess County Department of Social Services, The Berkshire Taconic Foundation, The Community Foundation of Dutchess County, a fundraising committee of its own, and other contributors.

The agency helps provide medical, financial, educational, and undocumented assistance, as well as food and clothing. With rural outreach locations in Millbrook, Pine Plains, Amenia, Clinton, Millerton, Stanfordville and Wingdale, those in need are able to make an appointment with the agency to acquire assistance. The central location in Dover is in operation from Monday through Friday, while the other community-based branches are available one to two days per week. They are feeding about 40 families a month, about double from a year ago. They have noticed the family sizes are often bigger as family members and non-members double up in one apartment to save rent.

DCCAP also facilitates the Big Brother and Big Sisters program. Both site and community-based programs are offered to support youth in need in the surrounding area.

During the holiday season DCCAP supports families in need with the Family Holiday Savings Program. Participating families are eligible to make monthly deposits at any rate from August to December, and DCCAP will

match the total deposit, dollar for dollar and up to \$150. The contribution is granted in December.

DCCAP’s local office is at 3414 Route 22 in Dover, and can be contacted at 845-877-9272. The agency also has branches at 84 Cannon St in Poughkeepsie, 44 - 46 East Market St. in Red Hook, and 554 Main St. in Beacon.

The Food of Life Pantry at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Amenia will be the local service available on Christmas Day.

Listed are local food pantries and their information:

Dutchess Community Action Partnership. Monday-Friday 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. by appointment or emergency. (845) 831-2620.

Center of Compassion Food Pantry at 9 Market St. in Dover. Monday-Friday. Welcome Table Meals April-November at St. Charles Borromeo Church on Wednesdays from 12 p.m.-1:30 p.m. (845) 877-9076.

Community Food Locker at United Methodist Church in Pine Plains. 3rd Saturday of every month. (518) 398-6080.

Food of Life Pantry at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Amenia. Fridays 3- 7 p.m. (845) 373-9161

Food For Folks at Lyall Federated Church in Millbrook. Collecting non-perishables and toiletries. (845) 677-3485.

Vines and Branches at Immaculate Conception Church in Amenia. 3rd Saturday of every month. (845) 373-8193.

New Year’s Eve Schedule Sponsored by the Millbrook Rotary Thursday, December 31, 2009, 5 to 9:15 pm Village of Millbrook, Top of Franklin Avenue

Jeff Armstrong
Flamenco Guitar
Grace Church
6:15-6:45; 7:45-8:15

Richard Bala
Folk tribute to the Hudson Valley
Last opportunity to celebrate the Quadricentennial!
Grace Church
7:00-7:30; 8:30-9:00

Buckaroo Bindlestiff’s
Featuring Cowboy Keith Wild West Jamboree & Miss Philly
Brought to you by the Dyson Foundation
On stage at the Thorne Building
5:00-5:45; 6:00-6:45; 7:00-7:45; 8:00-8:45

Larry Ham Duo
Jazz by a master of the keyboard
Lyll Church Sanctuary
5:00-5:30; 6:30-7:00; 8:00-8:30

Handman String Quartet
Classical music & more
Lyll Church Sanctuary
5:45-6:15; 7:15-7:45; 8:45-9:15

Peter Muir & Friends
Ragtime & Broadway
Grace Church
5:00-6:00

Tanglewood Marionettes
Presenting Sleeping Beauty
Lyll Church Gathering Room
5:00-5:45; 6:00-6:45 7:00-7:45; 8:00-8:45

Animated Films
Thorne Building
Continuous

Crowd Pleasers:
The ingenious **Mr. Twisty**
The beguiling **Behind the Mask** Roving Characters
Continuous

Donation: \$5.00 per button
Buttons available at: Merritt Bookstore, Reardon Briggs Hardware, Millbrook Variety Store, Village Wine & Spirits.

Presented by the Rotary Club of Millbrook.

Joshua Mackey Appointed Planning Board Chair

By Amy Belotti

In a letter to the Town of Washington’s Town Board, Planning Board Chair Tom Beaumont announced his resignation from his position. The letter was dated October 26 2009, and was read by Town Supervisor Prisco at the November 12th board meeting. Beaumont stated that he wished to resign on December 31st 2009, but was still interested in being a planning board member. He suggested planning board member Joshua Mackey as his replacement. The resignation was accepted, and the board planned to make a decision on Beaumont’s replacement in the future. At the Town Board Meeting on December 10th, a motion was passed to appoint Josh Mackey as Chair of the Planning Board.

Mackey has been practicing law for 11 years, and was recently named partner at Iseman, Cunningham, Riester & Hyde LLP in Poughkeepsie. His work focuses primarily on litigation as well as insurance and business law. While mostly working with large corporations, he also works for individual clients.

Mackey applied for a position on the town planning board in 2008 out of personal interest. He found that he disagreed with the direction of planning surrounding his Fishkill home, and upon his moving to Millbrook with his family six years ago, he took it upon himself to play a role in the area’s planning. “I think it’s everyone’s duty to participate in what’s going on around them,” he stated in an interview last week. He was appointed to a seven-year term on the planning board on February 7, 2008. He expects to serve as a facilitator who ensures adherence to the town code.

As chair of the planning board, Mackey will be serving the same



Josh Mackey. Photo by Amy Belotti.

seven-year term that he had as a board member. He will be responsible to run the meetings, form the agenda and work with the planning board’s consultant Neil Wilson. In reflecting upon his new position, he is proud to serve on the planning board and feels that his new role will be that of leader and facilitator.

Mackey serves on the board of Abilities First, Inc. an organization that advocates and supports people with disabilities and their families. He volunteers as an attorney with Legal Services of the Hudson Valley and received the distinguished Greater Southern Dutchess Chamber of Commerce “40 Under 40” award in 2008. A Dutchess County native, he is invested in the direction of the area in which he raises his family and continues his career.

Mackey first duty as chairman was to chair the workshop on December 22. The next planning board meeting will be December 29 at 7:30 p.m.