

Marin Independent Journal

JANUARY 28, 2008

MONDAY

MARINIJ.COM

50 CENTS

MARIN VOICE

Charity should begin at home

IN THIS NEW YEAR, we think about our world and the great challenges that lie ahead in the many troubled areas like sub-Saharan Africa, distressed inner city neighborhoods or the Mississippi Delta. It may come as a surprise that a deserving cause exists right here in California's wealthiest county: new facilities for the Marin Community Clinics that break ground this month.

Marin is an upstairs-downstairs county.

Those of us who are fortunate to own homes here, to work in the Bay Area and to educate our children in our fine local schools are indeed blessed. Yet many of the people who enrich our lives by cleaning our homes, caring for our babies, landscaping our gardens, and working in low-paid jobs in local restaurants and small stores are not as fortunate. A sad feature of this upstairs-downstairs situation is that many of these hard-working but low-income families do not have health insurance.

Is there really poverty in Marin? Yes, although it is invisible to many. In fact, 15 percent of Marin residents live below the poverty level, and 40 percent cannot afford health insurance. They lack insurance because their jobs don't provide it, and they are not eligible for Medi-Cal, California's Medicaid program. Does lacking health insurance make a difference? Of course, because most doctors, clinics and hospitals will not see uninsured patients, and buying expensive medicines without insurance is impossible for most poor people. Fortunately, there is one safe

STEVENSCHROEDER



Dr. Steven A. Schroeder is a professor of medicine at the University of California at San Francisco and the former president and chief executive officer of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. He and his wife Sally have lived in Tiburon since 1976.

haven for the uninsured: the Marin Community Clinics, with locations in Greenbrae and Novato. Serving Marin for 35 years, and staffed by dedicated physicians, nurses, and volunteers, the clinic provided 48,000 patient visits in 2006. Yet, because of insufficient capacity it had to turn away an additional 5,000 requests for patient care, and many others who needed help simply did not come.

Now the Marin Community Clinics are expanding in order to meet this demand. A new clinic has broken ground in San Rafael, close to the highest concentration of Marin's uninsured. The Novato and Greenbrae facilities will be relocated and enlarged. The Greenbrae clinic on the grounds of Marin General Hospital will finally serve a patient load appropriate to this modest facility. The cost of this new construction is being

HOW YOU CAN HELP

The nonprofit Marin Community Clinics' "Building A Healthy Future" campaign has raised more than \$7 million of the \$9.8 million needed for its new San Rafael clinic and expanded Novato clinic.

Contributions at all levels are welcome. For information on donating to the capital campaign, visit www.marinclinic.org or call 448-1546.

underwritten by a \$9.8 million campaign, which is off to a very successful start, having raised more than \$7 million since September. But more is needed.

Why should Marin residents support medical care in our county? For one, a community should be judged by how it cares for its less fortunate. To be without health care means that parents must see their asthmatic children struggle to breathe without proper medication, forego needed prenatal care that will put an infant in jeopardy and postpone the diagnosis of conditions such as breast cancer, high blood pressure or heart disease that will respond so much better if detected early and treated appropriately. Another reason is that when workers and their families are healthier, their job performance is better, their school attendance enhanced and — in short — their lives are improved.

So, while we give to the less fortunate elsewhere, let's not forget the needy right here. You will be improving the lives of thousands of wonderful people, as well as helping to keep our county strong and healthy.