

Tuesday, August 8, 2006

Bradley supports health centers

By GAIL OBER
Staff Writer

LACONIA — Congressman Jeb Bradley was on hand Monday morning to welcome a Franklin community health center's expansion to the Lake City and lend his support to health centers throughout New Hampshire.

Health First Family Care Center, a nonprofit health care organization that currently serves 3,000 Franklin-area residents, is slated for a November opening in the former Scott and Williams building at 286 Union Ave.

"Hat's off to you. Here's a shining example of all the parties working together," said Bradley, recognizing all the local, state, and federal agencies that came together to make the project possible, as well as the bipartisan support enjoyed by health centers in the United States government.

The groundbreaking also marks a week-long national celebration for community health centers and the 35,000 people who serve on the 4,000-plus community health centers throughout the country. There are 13 community health centers in New Hampshire, serving about 90,000 New Hampshire residents annually.



RICHARD SIVERBERG, LICSW Executive Director left, welcomes all who were major contributors in bringing to fruition the Health First Family Care Center at 266 Union Ave in Laconia during a ground breaking gathering at the facility Monday. (Daryl Carlson/Citizen Photo)

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Franklin's Health First passed its 10-year milestone this year. Executive Director Rick Silverberg estimates the new health center in Laconia will serve around 1,500 people in 2007 and will be initially staffed with a doctor, a nurse practitioner, and a counselor.

In three to five years, Silverberg expects to triple the staff and provide primary and preventive care service to about 8,000 Lakes Region residents.

Bradley has been recognized as a supporter of the expansion of health centers in America — a program recognized by President George Bush as one of the country's success stories.



TESS STACK KUENNING, with the Bi-State Primary Care Association, listens as Congressman Jeb Bradley discusses national health care outside the new Health First Family Care Center in Laconia Monday.

(Daryl Carlson/Citizen Photo)

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A member of the Congressional Community Health Care Caucus, Bradley supports increasing federal funding for health centers. Over the past five years, federal funding for community health centers has increased 48 percent, or

\$565 million, according to Bradley's office.

Community health center services are available to everyone but are critical in serving community residents who are uninsured or underinsured. They provide vital primary and preventive care and reduce the burden and costs associated with emergency room visits, said Bradley.

"This is one of the great success stories of the nation," he said, adding that some \$2 billion was spent on community health centers nationwide.

Bradley was joined by board members from Health First Family Care Center, representatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a representative of the national Association of Community Health Centers Inc., Thomas Clairmont, the chief executive officer and president of LRGHealthcare, and many other representatives of state and local community agencies.

Funding for the projects included \$1.75 million in loans from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a \$45,000 direct grant from the USDA for architectural design, and \$220,000 annually for five years from the LRGHealthcare.

Silverberg said Health First just secured an \$80,000 start-up training grant from the Endowment for Health, a private, nonprofit agency based in Concord.

Health First will be joined by the Wellness Center, which already has opened, and the Lakes Region Day Care Center in the ground floor of the building.

The upper floors are being converted to work-force housing.



**COMMEMORATING NATIONAL HEALTH CENTER week, Congressman Jeb Bradley, was on hand for the the ground breaking gathering of the new Health First Family Care Center at 266 Union Ave in Laconia Monday.
(Daryl Carlson/Citizen Photo)**

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