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Health clinic named for Weicker

Shaw's Cove facility dedicated

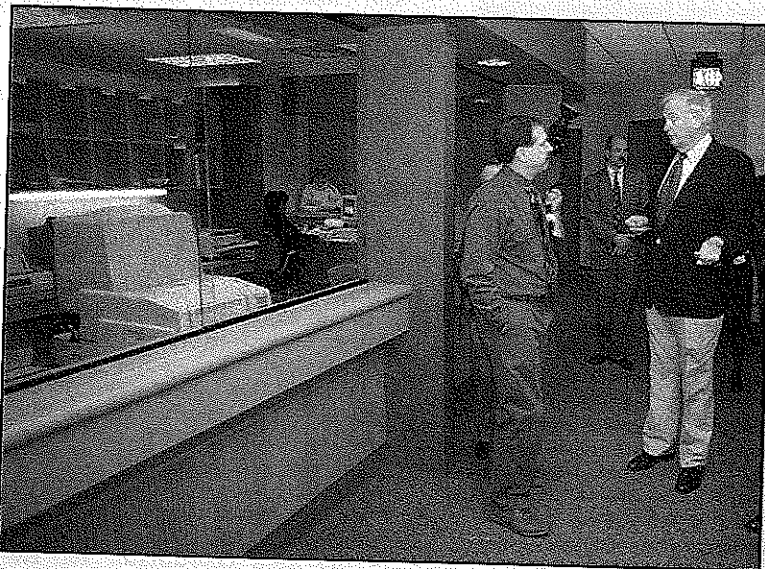
By JUDY BENSON
Day Staff Writer

New London — Officials of the Community Health Center of New London on Monday cut the ribbon on a new, larger facility, just two years after the private, non-profit organization took over the city-run medical and dental clinic for the uninsured and working poor.

With Gov. Lowell P. Weicker Jr. on hand, the ceremony included the announcement that the building, at One Shaw's Cove, would be called the Lowell P. Weicker Jr. Primary Care Center.

At 12,000 square feet, the new building is four times larger than the clinic's former offices in the city-owned Richard R. Martin Center on Broad Street. It is located in the Shaw's Cove office complex at Bank and Howard streets, on property once owned by the city Redevelopment Agency.

The building was in foreclosure when the health center purchased it from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. with



Gordon Alexander / The Day
Community Health Center President Mark Masselli with Gov. Lowell P. Weicker Jr. at the clinic's dedication Monday.

\$320,000 in state grants and about \$140,000 in bank loans. The new facility will provide primary medical, dental and mental health care to 10,000 patients annually, roughly twice the number it now serves.

"You might just stop and think, thousands of people are going to be cared for thanks to our \$320,000 investment," Weicker

said. "This isn't just bricks and mortar, it's human beings. It's the people you save from needless suffering, needless death."

Weicker said he was deeply honored that the building had been named for him. During his tour of the building, Weicker was

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visibly impressed.

"This is fabulous," he said at one nurses' station. "This is something we should be so proud of."

Weicker also received praise during the ceremonies. Mark Masselli, president of the organization that runs the New London clinic and other community health centers in Meriden, Middletown and Old Saybrook, credited the governor with helping get funding to expand low-cost clinics statewide.

"As governor you faced fiscal limitations, yet you funded community health centers," Masselli said. "When you took office, community health centers were caring for 80,000 people, and four years later they're caring for 150,000. While others were talking about health care reform, you laid the groundwork for unprecedented growth in the delivery of health care."

Masselli thanked many others who helped make the move possible, from the city officials who first opened the clinic for the poor and uninsured 20 years ago to the United Way to U.S. Rep. Sam Gejdensen, D-2nd District, who helped with negotiations with the FDIC.

"We didn't get here alone, and we can't get forward on our own," Masselli said.

Community Health Center is moving forward locally. A satellite clinic in Groton is scheduled to open by Jan. 1. Masselli said a building has not yet been chosen. It will provide primary medical and mental health care.

"We recognize there is a significant, medically underserved population in Groton," Masselli said.

Maria Montanaro, site director of the New London clinic, said the new offices complement the Community Health Center's philosophy

and are a vast improvement over its Broad Street offices.

"Asking patients to wait in a hallway with no windows and linoleum floors is dehumanizing," she said of the old offices, which were rented from the city for \$2,400 per month. "It didn't send a message of truly quality care. In our structure, we want to speak our ideals."

Because it is a non-profit facility, the clinic will be exempt from paying property taxes on the Shaw's Cove building.

Patricia Braun, a pediatrician at the clinic, noted that she and the other doctors each have offices in the new building. On Broad Street, Braun shared an office with two other physicians.

"We don't know what to do now that we're not on top of each other," she joked. "And the new

pediatric waiting room even has a fish tank."

The only drawback of the new building, Braun said, is that it is several blocks from the nearest bus stop.

"We're trying to get it on a main route," she said.

Several clinic patients were among those who attended Monday's ceremonies. One, Claude Moncrieffe of New London, was a member of the building committee that helped design the new offices. He and his family received good care at the Broad Street clinic, he said, but the facility was poor.

"This is not like going into a back room somewhere," he said. "This building makes so much sense. If you treat the problem before it becomes a big one, you can nip it in the bud before someone goes to the emergency room."

