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# Community health center sees 22 years of expansion

## Next site is New Britain

By Mary Trudeau

SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

It's come a long way from the three-room apartment on College Street, Middletown where, in 1973, a small group of local, concerned individuals started the Community Health Center.

"When we first started out, we had many volunteers and we didn't have any federal or state programs. Wesleyan College helped us renovate," said Mark Masselli, the center's president and CEO.

"We have become the largest provider in health care in a community health care setting in Connecticut, with locations in Groton, New London, Meriden, Old Saybrook, and we're planning to open a center in New Britain," Masselli said.

When the health center first opened, local doctors tried to shut it down, he recalled.

"Local doctors circulated a letter to the city's Health Department saying, 'How could this group be operating here?' They had the Health Department come down and say, 'What are you doing?'"

"There were no problems except that the hallways were half

an inch too narrow. We were given a cease and desist order to close but we persevered."

Local dentists were generous in providing services, but the only doctor who would volunteer his time came up from New York City.

"Health care is really about a level of politics that is more intense than local politics because there is a lot of power and money on the line," Masselli noted.

The center moved to its present headquarters at 635 Main St., Middletown in 1975. It operates on a sliding scale based on family size and income.

The volunteer staff in 1973 has grown to a payroll of over 200 today. And the range of services has expanded to include medical care, dental care, battered woman's services, mental health services, prenatal care and home-based services.

The center has a \$12 million annual operating budget, with the bulk of its support coming from patient reimbursements at 70 percent.

"This is progressive medicine because we look at each person's needs and each person pays to their own ability," Masselli said.