

# Community Health Center welcomes grant

## Federal funds will help it serve, expand

By Mary Ellen Godin  
Record-Journal staff

**MERIDEN** — The Community Health Center Inc. has come a long way since 1991, when a sole doctor treated patients from an office at the former St. Vincent DePaul Shelter.

Today CHC's State Street operation boasts 6,000 regular patients and an added 9,000 walk-ins. Although it offers primary care to the uninsured, underinsured and Medicaid patients, the operation can hardly be called a clinic.

The stateily building resembles a professional office park and the language spoken to patients is one of respect, said President Mark Masselli. About 36 full and part-time staff members provide medical, dental

and mental health care on an ability-to-pay basis to some of the city's poorest residents. Dental care, which is not covered by Medicaid is available at the Meri-Care Dental Clinic on Miller Street.

Thanks to a \$2.2 million federal grant, the Meriden Community Health Center can now do even more, Masselli said.

"It's a very substantial award for us. Almost one-third of the patients who use CHC are uninsured and pay on a sliding fee," Masselli said. "The federal funds will help to subsidize the cost of that care."

The Department of Health and Human Services grant will be spread over five years with the first payment of more than \$420,818 expected in July 2000. The funds will pay to expand the building, add more examination rooms to the 11 now used, and bring the dental operation to the center.

CHC also plans on hiring a much needed social services worker, said acting Site Director Shirley Fryer. A social service worker could help link patients to community agencies that



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The Community Health Center has grown greatly since its inception in 1991 at the city's homeless shelter.

can help them find other support services.

"Sometimes the mothers are in need of social services, or need counseling," pediatrician Jacqueline Kirby said. "There are mothers who

need nutrition education and counseling. We serve a large pediatric population."

The Meriden operation is one of six CHC centers in Connecticut. The nonprofit agency has sites in Mid-

dletown, New London, Old Saybrook, New Britain and Groton. Only the New Britain and New London centers have received federal grants. Meriden CHC, which is funded by state grants and private donations was due for its share, Masselli said.

"We think Meriden has missed out on the opportunity for accessible significant federal dollars to help deal with the uninsured population," he said. "There's a whole group that falls through the cracks."

City Health Department officials and U.S. Rep. James Maloney, D-5th District, lobbied the federal government to fund the request.

Maloney's office reports that there are 48 million people nationwide without medical insurance.

"This is shocking and disturbing," the congressman said. "They agreed the health clinic has ample need for this additional funding. This is one of those days when I go home and feel good about what we're doing."