

This is a printer-friendly version of an article from [www.theday.com](http://www.theday.com) or [www.zip06.com](http://www.zip06.com). To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

---

Article published May 1, 2012

## Community Health Center marks 20 years in New London

By [Judy Benson](#) Day Staff Writer

### Nonprofit gives primary care for those below poverty level

**New London** - In the waiting room of the Community Health Center on Monday, one patient waited outside the lab to get her blood drawn, while a young Spanish-speaking couple with an infant checked out just as an elderly man was called in for his appointment.

"Hi, how are you?" asked one of the medical assistants, as she led another patient, a middle-aged man, into one of the exam rooms.

"Terrible," he replied.

Also among the dozen or so in the waiting room just past noon was Gerald Lebon of Groton, who had come to see Dr. John Monroe for a post-surgery check-up.

"They take good care of me here," said Lebon, a CHC patient for 11 years. He comes for care about five to seven times a year, and his girlfriend is also a patient there.

Today, the CHC will mark two milestones in its years of providing medical, dental and mental health care at its network of 13 clinics statewide, including those in New London, Groton, Old Saybrook and Clinton. The nonprofit, which holds as its motto "Health care is a right, not a privilege," is turning 40, while the New London site is celebrating its 20th anniversary.

In addition, the CHC runs several school-based health clinics around the state, including one at the ISAAC School in New London.

Anniversary events are scheduled today at its Middletown headquarters, which opened as a free dental clinic in an apartment in that city's downtown and is now in a new, 48,000-square-foot building.

Twenty years ago, the CHC took over a clinic in New London then run by the city and Lawrence & Memorial Hospital. Dr. Monroe, the longest-serving physician at the New London center, started there 19 years ago, when CHC was located in the city's Richard R. Martin Social Services Center, a former school.

"It was make-do," Monroe said. "There was no real waiting room. We just had chairs in the hallway. We had six or seven exam rooms, some classroom-sized, some closet-sized. My desk had three legs and a drawer handle that was part of a coat hanger."

In 1994, the center purchased an office building in Shaw's Cove that became its New

### If you go

What: Tours of CHC's new primary care center

Where: 675 Main St., Middletown

When: Noon to 2 p.m. Saturday

More information: [www.chc1.com](http://www.chc1.com)

London site. This year, it added 10 exam rooms in a 5,000-square-foot addition. In sharp contrast to the Martin Center space, the Shaw's Cove site looks and feels like any professional medical office instead of like a bare-bones facility for the poor, Monroe said.

The center prides itself on its use of advanced technology, becoming the first primary care system in the state to adopt an electronic medical records system, and integrating video conferences with specialists and telemedicine for patients with conditions such as hepatitis C and diabetic retinopathy.

"You don't really feel like a clinic patient when you come here," Monroe said.

More than 90 percent of CHC's 130,000 patients statewide have household incomes at or below the poverty rate, the majority of them covered by Medicare or Medicaid. About one in every four of New London's 26,000 residents receives primary care at the center, Monroe said.

Without CHC in New London, he said, "it would be a disaster in the ER (at L&M). It would be flooded with people coming in for toenail fungus and other noncritical stuff," along with those with chronic conditions like diabetes and asthma who are best treated with regular monitoring in a primary care setting.

CHC has recently been recognized for the quality of its primary care by two national accrediting organizations, the Joint Commission and the National Committee for Quality Assurance.

"We will always be trying to move forward toward our goal of building a world-class primary care system for the folks who need it most," said Mark Masselli, founder, president and chief executive officer of CHC.

[j.benson@theday.com](mailto:j.benson@theday.com)

---