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News

Community Health Center officially opens new facility in Middletown

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MIDDLETOWN — The Community Health Center ceremoniously opened the doors to its new clinic on Main Street with a ribbon cutting, tours of the new facility and a reception to celebrate the event Saturday.

The ribbon cutting is part of the organization's 40th anniversary celebration.

Until the \$17 million, 48,000-square-foot, five-story "green" building was completed, the organization used several small spaces in buildings on the north end. The Community Health Center will retain those buildings for its administrative offices and move all clinical operations to the new building.

It was one of those spaces on the north end where a small group of Wesleyan students used in the organization's infancy.

Among those Wesleyan students was John Hickenlooper, better known today as Colorado's governor. Hickenlooper came to Middletown Saturday to celebrate with his fellow organizers from the Wesleyan campus in the early 1970s.

He recalled those early days, when he was coerced and bullied by Community Health Center President and CEO Mark Masselli to join the cause.

"I can't speak for the other 19- and 20-year-olds who were involved with trying to help set up idea of a health care center, but I can tell you from my point of view, one reason was Mark was a lot bigger than I was. And in many ways very threatening," he said, in jest.

"But it was that idea that health care is at the center of everything a community should be," he said.

Hickenlooper spoke of his introduction to public service, which was penning letters The Middletown Press for Masselli.

"I remember Mark would coach me, because he couldn't put his own name in. The establishment was adamantly against [a clinic]. They felt very threatened...I was the one who wrote letters to the Middletown Press. 'How dare councilperson Holbott say health care is not a right, and how they question funding, and how can they tear up a sidewalk and question this dental position'...I'd write the letter and he'd look at it and say 'no no no, you can't say that.' But that was my early coaching in public service and Mark would paint a wonderful picture like he he's done so for the

past 40 years," he said.

Mayor Dan Drew was also among the dignitaries on hand for the ribbon cutting Saturday.

"As Mark described how the Community Health Center began, it's amazing to think a handful of people can do so much with pluck and determination and their will power, their will power to dream big on behalf of their fellow man...We celebrate the construction of a building, but even more than that we're here to celebrate the growth of an organization that does more for people everyday than we can ever realize," he said.

Masselli too reminisced of the early days, when the health center was just an idea among a handful of students, and how they realized that idea and built on it to what it is today. He said that wouldn't be possible if it wasn't for the citizens of Middletown.

"Today the Health Center serves 130,000 people at over 200 locations all across Connecticut...We didn't get here on our own and we can't move forward alone. We got here because of the citizens of Middletown, because of a community who stood up in very difficult times and said let's lend our shoulder to this vision that health care should be a right and not a privilege. And that was so important to us," he said.

Masselli went on to thank the numerous employees, volunteers and supporters who worked tirelessly to make Community Health Center possible.

After the remarks by guests, Masselli, Drew and a group of Macdonough school students cut the ribbon to the entryway to the new building, where staff members led tours of the new state-of-the-art facility.

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