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## Middlesex County health care volunteers lauded for giving back

By Alex Gecan, The Middletown Press

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MIDDLETOWN >> Federal service volunteers come to Middlesex County Tuesday from all over the country.

City Mayor Daniel Drew issued a proclamation at the Community Health Center — on the same day as hundreds of mayors nationwide — thanking local volunteers in federal service for their work.

“You’re going to make an indelible impact on the lives of the people you’ve touched,” said Drew. “Their lives are richer for having known you.”

Most of the volunteers assembled Tuesday worked with the Community HealthCorps, an AmeriCorps affiliate that places volunteers in health-care professions with an emphasis on underserved Americans.

The volunteers in Middlesex County have worked to enroll residents in health insurance programs, connect people to housing and treatment programs and different jobs in between.

Matthew Johnson, who graduated from Wake Forest last spring, has worked at the Eddy Shelter in Middletown and housing programs elsewhere in the county, mostly in outreach and communication, promoting programs and doing some case management.

The 23-year-old Durham native studied psychology as an undergraduate and said he wanted to promote the biopsychosocial model of medicine — that is, examining patients’ medical and emotional issues rather than treating them as a bag of symptoms.

“It’s not just the physical aspects behind the case,” said Johnson.

If a patient’s mood is changing, for example, medical professionals might ask, “What else is going on in their life?” he said.

Johnson will be going back to school, medical school this time, in the fall at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb.

Emma Garrison, a 22-year-old Ithaca College alum from Washington State, has been working with the CHC’s Meriden location, helping out its nurse-midwife and stress-reduction programs and also enrolling new patients.

Fluent in Spanish, she would interpret for Spanish-speaking prenatal patients.

Garrison studied environmental health at Ithaca and had intended to pursue a graduate degree in public health. That ambition changed, she said, “to go for a nursing degree with a focus on education for

marginalized groups like rural farmers.”

Most of the HealthCorps volunteers work for 10 to 12 months.

Meaghan Erhart, an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer working with the North End Action Team, helped convene the proclamation. Main Street restaurants Mondo, Fusion, Public Market and Sweet Harmony kicked in for the catering.

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