

News

## Residents begin enrolling for health coverage

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NEW BRITAIN — Elly Banos probably wouldn't call herself a "pioneer." Yet, years from now when health care officials reminisce about the Affordable Care Act's first day in New Britain, Banos's name might just come up.

The 48-year-old city resident, an employee of Lowes Home Improvement on the Berlin Turnpike, said she had come to the CT Health Access Fair Tuesday because she was uninsured.

"I couldn't afford health insurance from my employer; so, I was hoping I could find basic coverage here at the Community Health Care Center," she said.

A leading health care provider since 1972, CHC expected mostly patients would visit its Lafayette Street headquarters for help in enrolling. However, almost half of the 30 people looking for help in the application process were non-patients.

Visitors to the center got greetings and a warm welcome from Mark Masselli, president, CEO and founder of the center; Margaret Flinter, CHC's senior vice president and clinical director; Michael Rohde, mayor of Meriden and Tim O'Brien, mayor of New Britain.

Masselli stressed that it has always been his belief that it should be called the "Obama Really Does Care Act." Flinter noted that many seniors have been forced to choose between paying for groceries and prescriptions. Rohde said he recalled the negative reaction when Social Security and later, Medicare was introduced. O'Brien said it was time to settle this issue. "The cost to our society of not having good health care for everybody is far greater than any real or imagined cost," he said.

CHC scheduled uninsured people to visit its office to open the enrollment process. The session ran from 3 to 7 p.m. More and more walk-ins strolled in as the day progressed.

Shannon Bali, an outreach certified applications counselor, said she and other staffers were helping people figure out what coverage they were eligible for and sign them up.

At one point, Bali and others had to resort to pen and paper when the computer system went down.

This glitch didn't faze Banos.

Banos said she had read about the enrollment fair in The Herald. When she saw that non-patients were welcome, she decided to check it out. She said she was looking for affordable health insurance and had not yet decided on a plan. First, she created an account by stating her annual income, then answering four questions for security purposes. Her premium at Lowes was \$70 every two weeks.

“That was too high,” she said. “I couldn’t afford it. So, I had to drop it.”

Banos, who is single with no children, found a plan she liked and could afford, and was checking to see if her doctors were on the list and what the co-pays were. How did she rate her experience at the center?

“Everyone has been helpful,” she said. “If it weren’t for these people, I’d be lost.” She said she would definitely recommend the fair to her friends — it returns in November — and urge them to visit the website, [accesshealth.com](http://accesshealth.com).

Banos said she hoped to wrap up everything and walk away with a policy. Her coverage would start Jan. 1. Until then she said she will pray to God she doesn’t get sick or in a car accident.

CHC staffer Stefan Kostolitz said the point of Access Health is that “there’s no wrong door, no wrong entry points. You can apply with someone like me or over the phone or with a licensed broker. We try to meet people where they’re at.”

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