

Meriden

Original investor checks up on CHC

By Andrew Perlot
Record-Journal staff

MERIDEN — In 1972, when John W. Hickenlooper gave what little money he had toward his friend's idealistic goal of creating a low-cost health center in Middletown, he couldn't have imagined that 35 years later he would be standing at a spinoff facility in Meriden, watching doctors rushing about, helping those who normally wouldn't be able to afford medical care.

Today, Hickenlooper is the mayor of Denver, and was back in Connecticut this week for the 35th anniversary of Community Health Centers Inc. He toured the Community Health Center of Meriden Thursday

afternoon to see how things had progressed.

His old friend, Mark Maselli, is still the chief executive officer of CHC. From the original run-down building in Middletown, CHC has expanded to 11 branch offices and clinics in 100 schools, offering primary care to most of the state's low-income regions.

The whole idea came out of the realization that the poor were going to emergency rooms when their ailments had become severe and extremely expensive to treat, Hickenlooper said. Maselli realized that if quality, low-cost care could be provided, poor people could save a lot of money.

"It's a fiscally imperative responsibility," Hickenlooper said of providing health care to the poor. "It saves money by increasing the arc of despair."

The Denver Health Medical Center is a close equivalent of CHC, but while Connecticut has a network all over the state, Colorado has only the one center. "This is a national model, what they have here," Hickenlooper said.

Community Health Center of Meriden Director Lou Brady said that CHC is mostly self-sustaining, paying expenses with insurance money. The key, he said, is offering efficient, high-quality health care.

The Meriden office does not look like a facility on a shoestring budget. Everything is kept up, aesthetically appealing, and not unlike what you'd find in any doctor's office.

A dinner to mark CHC's 35th anniversary was scheduled for

Thursday night. "We're inviting a lot of the people that helped the health center grow," Brady said. "We want to show appreciation for the partners we have in the community."

One of the key messages of the group is that health should not be limited by income.

"Health care is not a privilege," Hickenlooper said. "It's a right."

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