

Health clinic is dedicated in Middletown

Center to serve Macdonough School

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MIDDLETOWN — Sean Sokoloski sat smiling in the back of the gymnasium as adults hailed the Macdonough School health clinic Monday night.

He, perhaps more than any of them, knew the value of the mini-medical center — it is, after all, for people such as him.

"It's going to be a good idea," the Macdonough fourth grader said. "This way there's people there to take care of [us]."

Open a few weeks, the clinic offers free medical treatment, health education and counseling services.

Monday night, about 50 people attended formal dedication ceremonies for the program, more than six months in the making.

Organizers named the center after Macdonough School nurse Rita Hayes, a supporter of the clinic who died in February.

Macdonough School Principal Pamela Muraca Monday night recalled when she and Hayes first worked together six years ago, when Macdonough students were temporarily housed at Spencer School.

The nurse's office had tiles hanging from the ceiling and curling up from the floor, Muraca said, and the storage area was in what used to be a girl's shower stall.

"There was a sink," Muraca recalled. "Unfortunately, water did not come out of it."

Muraca and Hayes' son, Dennis, Monday night cut a ribbon at the entry to the clinic, which has a new examining table, rows of cabinets, medical equipment and even a computer.

The clinic is funded through the end of the school year with an \$80,000 grant from the state Depart-

ment of Health Services. Organizers this month applied for a \$100,000 state grant to operate the clinic during 1993-94; the state is expected make a decision within the next few weeks.

Lynn Letarte, supervisor of the health department's school and adolescent health section, has said that once a clinic is open, securing more money to operate it is easier.

The clinic's social work and outreach services are scheduled to stay in place this summer, thanks to a \$20,000 grant from The Aetna Foundation, the insurance company's philanthropic arm. The Aetna grant is contingent on the state granting money for 1993-94.

"Aetna, I'm glad I met you," joked Mark Masselli, president of Community Health Center.

The health center holds the license for the clinic and will provide its medical services; Middlesex Hospital provides the outreach worker and social worker who also staff the clinic.

Masselli and several other speakers credited Middlesex's Dona Hoff, the clinic's manager and the primary author of the grant applications, for helping start the project. Superintendent of Schools David Larson presented Hoff with a certificate of appreciation from the board of education.

"Your voice was a clarion call to individuals and to agencies to come together to work for children," Masselli said.

Nearly 170 of Macdonough's 260 students have enrolled at the clinic so far, Muraca said. Early student visits have been for simple ailments such as colds and scraped knees, but health center vice president Margaret Flinter promised more sophisticated services starting in the fall.

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