

Bangor's MARCHA festivities Sunday

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BANGOR — Local, state, and national dignitaries will be on hand Sunday, Aug. 18 to help celebrate the new Bangor Community Health Center. The dedication ceremonies are from 4 to 7 p.m.

Billy Sandlin, Director of the Office of Migrant Health, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), will speak on the topic of "Federal Participation in the Delivery of Health Care in Rural Areas."

In 1971 what is now the Migrant and Rural Community Health Association (MARCHA) was formed, primarily for the purpose of providing health services to migrant and seasonal farmworkers.

Over the years, MARCHA has expanded its services and the spectrum of services it provides. MARCHA's services include primary health care; dental services; women, infant, and children (WIC) services, and referrals to other sources. "We're hoping to expand our pediatric and obstetric services to our patients," said Roberta Ryder, Executive Director.

GREATER NUMBERS OF medically underserved and underserved persons have approached MARCHA centers for care. "The biggest problem in the old facility was that there were more patients than we could handle. Everyone was crowded," remembers Ryder.

In addition to the Bangor Community Health Center, MARCHA operates non-profit facilities in Holland, Benton Harbor, and Eau Claire.

The new facility opened for service July 1 at 308 Charles St. and replaces the center on M-43 West.

Ryder feels the Center has had a very positive effect on the community. "In 1971 we were created to help farmworkers. Now we've expanded and offer services to area residents in addition to the farmworkers."

"In order to have a quality program it was important to be here year round, it didn't make sense to be available only for patients who were here for only part of the year," explained Ryder.

MARCHA CHARGES TWO types of fees. Those patients earning an average income pay a regular fee, which Ryder feels is competitive with other health facilities. Those with a limited income pay a fee based on a sliding scale and may apply for a discount based on income, family size, and ability to pay. According to Ryder the discount is about 10-20 percent.

MARCHA is a private, non-profit organization. Therefore the revenues received from patients' charges go directly back into the center. However, the majority of revenues come from the Department of Health and Human Services. According to Ryder, the primary budget cut came in 1981 and resulted in staff reductions. Since then spending levels have been kept down to low levels.

Numerous studies have shown that farm workers suffer high rates of infectious, parasitic, and toxic diseases. Parasitic disease is more common among U.S. field workers than among Guatemalan children. Ryder said there has been a definite improvement in the health of area farm workers in the last 14 years. The Bangor Community Health Center serves 12,000 migrant workers annually, in addition to 3,000 more patients in the Bangor area and 3,000 in the Benton Harbor area.

The center will be dedicated to "The Children" symbolized by the words "They are the children, they are the future." According to Ryder the inspiration for the theme came from the recent song and efforts of the U.S. Aid to Africa's song "We are the World." "Whether you're rich or poor, black, red, brown, or yellow, children need proper health care," said Ryder.

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