

OUTSTANDING DOCTORS OUTSTANDING CARE

Joseph Behan, MD Featured in *The Dallas Morning News*



Needy Can Count on Grand Prairie Wellness Center

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The rainbow logo that greets clients at the Grand Prairie Wellness Center is truly a sign of hope.

The pecan tree-shaded center at 1710 Small St., adjacent to Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and School, helps meet the medical and dental needs of low-income, uninsured families.

The wellness center opened in November 2001 to fill a void left by the closing of a hospital and its health outreach program that included a medical van staffed with a registered nurse.

The van's busiest stop was at Immaculate Conception Church. Its northeast Grand Prairie neighborhood had been designated "Medically Underserved" by the Texas Department of Health. Even before the hospital closed, parish leaders had begun raising funds to purchase property and build a clinic.

The center hosts volunteer dentists and dental hygienists, chiropractors, primary care physicians, registered nurses and licensed counselors. A paid executive director oversees the volunteer office staff. Clients are screened for eligibility, and services are provided

free or at a reduced rate. In 2005, the wellness center assisted 2,924 people.

Volunteer duties at the center turned into a career for Hortencia Rodriguez. She began volunteering as an office assistant and then as a medical assistant after receiving her degree from El Centro College.

When the acting executive director left in 2003, Ms. Rodriguez was hired to run the center. She does double duty as medical assistant when needed.

Much of Ms. Rodriguez's time is devoted to recruiting physicians. She is excited to announce that gynecologist Dr. Joseph Behan will be providing women's services. It is no coincidence that Dr. Behan's mother sings in the church choir with Ms. Rodriguez. "There is a lot of begging involved," she said, laughing.

The center has two active chiropractors and is looking for a third. The center needs two dentists, too.

"We operate a lot on faith," Ms. Rodriguez said. "When one of our providers leaves, we pray for another to take their place."

Dr. Mark Bickston, a dentist and occasional volunteer, hopes more will donate a few hours a month to the center.

"It is very gratifying," he said. "The patients are so appreciative. The staff is great. Everything you need is right there. You don't have to do anything but show up."

The nonprofit center depends on funding from individuals and companies, grants from foundations and Community Development Block Grants through the city.

Chuck Poffenbarger, board president, said a major fundraiser for the center will be a luncheon at Texas Roadhouse from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Nov. 15. Tickets are

\$25 each, and there will also a silent auction and raffle. Table sponsors are needed as well as donations of auction and raffle items.

To sponsor or buy a ticket to the luncheon, or to volunteer your time and talents, visit www.gpwellnesscenter.org, or call 972-266-9123.

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