

# Network News

**Do not confuse motion and progress. A rocking horse keeps moving but does not make any progress.**

**- Alfred A. Montapert**

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## Network Awarded \$60,000 Abstinence Education Grant

The Heartland Rural Health Network, Inc. (HRHN) was one of 29 organizations in Florida recently awarded a grant from the Florida Department of Health to provide community-based abstinence education program services to local teenagers in Highlands County. HRHN received \$60,000.00 to implement several local initiatives in close partnership with the Highlands County Teen Pregnancy Prevention Alliance (TPPA) and the Highlands County Health Department (HCHD). The grant period is from February 1, 2008 and ends June 30, 2008. Based on the availability of funding, grants can be funded for up to two additional years. The purpose of Florida's Abstinence-Only Education Program is to reduce teenage sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, births to unwed teens and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) by promoting abstinence until marriage as the expected societal norm for youth. According to the Florida Department of Health Community Health Assessment Resource Tool Set (2006) of all of Florida's 67 counties, Highlands County ranks 43<sup>rd</sup> highest for births to girls 10-14, 16<sup>th</sup> highest for births to girls 15-19, and 29<sup>th</sup> highest for births to girls under 18. Two

areas in which Highlands County has been consistently higher than the state's rates are the rate of births to mothers ages 15-19 and births to mothers under 18. Highlands County's rates are higher than the state for every



Girls, Go Guys, and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Teen Panel Summits. Go Girls focuses on giving girls inspiration and resources for lasting self esteem which aims to help them make wise choices in their daily lives. Small groups of 8 to 12 girls gather 90 minutes each week for a total of eight weeks per program. Topics include communication skills, identifying healthy and unhealthy relationships, models for decision making, how to identify short and long term goals, the impacts of teenage pregnancy on youth, and other self-motivational topics. This program is free. The Go Guys pilot program is similar to the Go Girls program structure but includes topics relevant to boys. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade Teen Panel Summits are held in May and are one

year starting in 1997 and ending with the latest released data of 2006. There were 46 births to mothers under 18 in Highlands County in 2006. According to a calculation provided by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy these 46 babies born to teens under 18 equals a \$945,000.00 cost to Highlands County Tax Payers (includes costs from 0-18 years of age). This grant provides funding to support three local programs geared towards teenagers between the ages of 12-18: Go

day events that involve both boys and girls from the various middle schools in the county. Through the support of the local School Board and several churches the girls and boys are able to enjoy a day of presentations made by various community groups focusing on drugs, abstinence, and various other positive messages. The Teen Panel Summits have been a successful event over the past three years. For more information or to register for the Go Girls program contact Susie Buelow,



Florida Hospital  
Heartland

*“...The Network was recently awarded a grant that will help provide a limited number of mammogram vouchers to women between the ages of 40-49”*

## *Limited Mammography Vouchers Available Through Local Grant*

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), breast cancer is the most common cause of cancer among women of all races. Breast cancer incidence is often attributed to poverty and socio-economic factors. Highlands, DeSoto, and Hardee Counties all have higher poverty rates—almost double—compared to the state and national levels. Additionally, Hardee County ranks 2nd and DeSoto County ranks 3rd out of Florida’s 67 counties as having the highest percentage of uninsured individuals under the age of 65 while Highlands County ranks 32nd. All of these factors greatly influence a woman’s ability to receive regular mammography screenings. There is a program operated by the State of Florida (which receives dollars from the CDC) called the Florida Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program which provides Clinical Breast Exams and Pap Smears along with a mammography free of charge for women who have no health insurance, are between the ages of 50-64, and are at or below 200% FPL. This is a fantastic program, but it’s missing a huge population of our rural women who fit the general eligibility criteria and

who should be receiving a regular mammogram according to the NCI but do not qualify for the program because of their age. There are no other programs locally that provide mammograms free of charge or at a reduced fee for women between 40-49 years of age who are uninsured and low-income. Surrounding communities receive funds from the local Susan G. Komen for the Cure affiliate offices, but none of the six affiliate offices in Florida cover our three most rural counties; Hardee, Highlands and DeSoto Counties. Network staff have communicated with these Komen affiliates to inquire about the opportunity for any of them to expand to cover our rural areas since these are often the communities most in need due to lack of local resources. The responses were disheartening as it doesn’t sound like this is a task that will be undertaken by the affiliates anytime soon due to their own funding issues. Network staff are in the process of contacting the national Susan G. Komen for the Cure office with our concerns as all Florida counties should have some form of representation by the Susan G. Komen for the Cure affiliates.

Thankfully, the Gulf Coast

Community Foundation of Venice recently awarded the Network a grant to provide a limited number of mammograms to women between the ages of 40-49. There are some eligibility criteria that a woman must meet before she is given a mammogram voucher. The woman must be: a) between the ages of 40-49; b) have no health care coverage; c) be living at or below 200% FPL; d) have not had a mammogram in the last two years. The Network has partnered with Florida Hospital Seascapes Imaging and DeSoto Memorial Hospital who have both agreed to accept our mammography vouchers and have also provided the Network with a discounted rate which includes the screening and the reading. The Network staff are very excited about this new endeavor and would like to thank the local hospitals for their support of this grant program. More grant funds are being sought by the Network to include even more women, but at this time only a limited number are available to women most in need of receiving a mammogram and have no funds to pay for this screen. For more information please contact the Network at 863-452-6530.

## *DeSoto Puts The Light Out on Smoking*



The DeSoto County Health Department (DCHD) took a giant step forward in the effort to make DeSoto County a little less tobacco friendly with the addition of two Tobacco Prevention Specialists (TPS) in March,

2008. These positions were funded through a three year grant provided through the Department of Health. DCHD has been “tobacco free” on all of its campuses since November, 2007. Counseling and nicotine replacement therapies are available to

DCHD employees at no cost as part of the initiative to model positive health behaviors in the community and improve the health and welfare of staff. This template will be offered to local government and businesses in the upcoming year.

*Article Submitted by DCHD*

## *Mahoney Announces Diabetes Program Grant for Heartland Rural Health Network*

(Avon Park, FL) - **Congressman Tim Mahoney (FL-16)** is pleased to announce that the Heartland Rural Health Network, Inc. in Avon Park, has been awarded a grant from the United States Department of Health and Human Services' division of Health Resources and Services in the amount of \$169,530.00. This grant money will assist Heartland Rural Health, Inc. institute a Diabetes program for the rural communities of Highlands County designed to assist with all aspects of diabetes care, research and maintenance.

"I congratulate the Heartland Rural Health Network for their ambitious efforts. Their success in securing funding demonstrates that perseverance and dedication to a cause will ultimately pay off," said **Congressman Tim Mahoney**. "At a time of skyrocketing costs of healthcare, it is crucial that the medical needs of rural communities such as Highlands

County be recognized and not forgotten."

"The Heartland Rural Health Network is enormously pleased with the support and the financial assistance being provided by the Health Resources & Services Administration, Office of Rural Health Policy by the funding of this grant. This program will enable us to work closely with our local physicians and other health care providers in implementing a program which is designed to increase the health status of our local residents and save lives," said **J. Rudy Reinhardt, Executive Director of Heartland Rural Health Network**. "The Heartland Rural Health Network would like to thank the legislators at both the state and federal levels for their continued support of programs that benefit our rural communities."

The Heartland Rural Health Network is one of nine rural health networks in the State of

Florida. These networks were created by an act of the State legislature in 1993. The primary mission of the Heartland Rural Health Network is to get together with the health care providers in our area to determine the best way to provide quality health care services to our rural residents.

The significant increase in the prevalence of diabetes across the United States, including all of our rural communities has been a source of concern to our health care providers for several years now. Studies have shown that the prevalence of diabetes has increased by 33% over the last decade as a result of an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, the epidemic of obesity, the growth of ethnic groups at risk for the disease and the aging of the population. Diabetes is now the fifth leading cause of death in the United States.

The grant submitted by the Heartland Rural Health Network and

done in cooperation with community groups such as the Community Health Improvement Planning Council (CHIP), proposes to address this problem by working with local health care providers by implementing the Diabetes Master Clinician Program that was developed in 2003 by the Florida Academy of Family Physicians. Dr. Edward Shahady is the Medical Director of the Diabetes Master Clinician Program. This program's goal is to facilitate diabetes care excellence in the outpatient setting.

This grant is for a three year period, totaling \$524,590.00. The funding for subsequent years is based on availability of funds. For more information on this grant please contact Network staff at 452-6530 or via e-mail at [rudy.reinhardt@hrhn.org](mailto:rudy.reinhardt@hrhn.org)

## *Tampa General Hospital Opens State of the Art Emergency and Trauma Center*

With an expenditure of nearly \$200 million and an addition of over 200 employees, Tampa General Hospital on Tampa's Davis Islands opened a facility prepared for any large scale crisis. With an emphasis on comfort and convenience, the new center provides an increase in rooms and facilities, while keeping a ready eye on the potential for most any type of disaster Tampa could face.

For most patients, the hospital can now offer the convenience of 24 hour valet parking and a pager provided upon arrival. Comfortable seating and lounges with wifi greet customers immediately upon arrival. Waiting rooms have great views of Tampa's waterways, and the waiting room has a beach themed pediatric play and theater area.

Each private room includes a door for privacy, and telephones, wash-room, and television for privacy and comfort. The colors and designs continue with a beach and nautical theme, helping to chase away some of the uncomfortable feeling that a hospital visit can provide. Full registration will take place at bedside,

rather than a waiting room.

While the appearance seems softer, the preparedness for possible catastrophic events is hard and ready. Formerly on ground level, the new emergency room is now 22 feet above sea level, settling concerns about flooding. The emergency center is almost double the size of the previous facility - six trauma rooms are combined with 66 private treatment rooms. Over 70 different additional locations exist for oxygen and other hookups. Many rooms are equipped with negative pressure facilities to assist in handling infectious diseases or other matter. Every room in the new center has the equipment necessary to handle double the planned patient capacity, and the hospital is now

prepared to handle up to 250 patients.

The expansion also includes a doubling of the Aeromed Command Center. With over 2,000 flights per year, the helicopter program operates from three locations - Tampa General, Citrus County, and Sebring. In addition, the parking garage is equipped to quickly turn into a shower area to wash more than 200 patients per hour from hazardous material clean ups and assignment for medical care.

With over 5 years in the design and construction process, a life size 3d model was constructed in order to recreate the feeling of what parts of the facility would look like and to evaluate functionality. 5,000 suggestions of vari-

ous types were made and incorporated in the final center. The new state of the art equipment is a source of pride among staff and has already been helpful in recruiting new staff members.

Tampa General Hospital treats over 68,000 patients per year, including about 100 major trauma cases each month. As the region's only level 1 trauma center, Tampa General Hospital has taken a major leap in providing even better patient care with their new expansion. The economic impact of over \$200 million in construction and over 200 new jobs is also a significant boost to Tampa.

*\*Article taken from Davis Island Today, November 7, 2007. Written by Bill Sharpe.*



**Tampa General Hospital's Bayshore Pavilion Opening in Phases 2007/2008**

## Central Florida Health Care, Inc. Celebrates 35 Years of “Quiet Revolution”

Since the early 1960's, the inhuman working and living conditions of migrant labor across the United States were spotlighted in both media and grassroots campaigns for change. Having acquired Minute-Maid and its Florida groves, Cocoa-Cola found itself in the spotlight to answer for the conditions in Frostproof. Fortunately for Coke, then company president J. Paul Austin had already launched efforts to improve life for those working in the groves; when asked his opinion, rather than defending his company's records, he candidly stated that the living conditions were deplorable. Florida Rural Health Services, which eventually became Central Florida Health Care, Inc. (CFHC), was one of many programs spearheaded in addition to housing. Eventually, the story was captured in a book entitled, *The Quiet Revolution: The Story of a Small Miracle in American Life*, by Robert F. Allen and Sara Harris. On November

9th, 2007, CFHC celebrated 35 years of service to the vision of this quiet revolution with its extended family, including guest speaker Samuel F. Morrison, director of the Frostproof Learning Library in 1972. CFHC also honored its cotemporary partners who have helped the organization grow from a single medical/dental clinic to a health center system serving Polk, Hardee, and Highlands Counties.

While CFHC has achieved tremendous growth, it's not done yet; service expansions are planned through 2008. Board Chair David Duke, in a letter to all assembled, stated: “A strong network at the federal, state, and local levels is critical to execute our plans to successfully achieve our future goals.”

Community Health Centers Alliance (CHCA), working with Travis Blanton in Tallahassee, was able to ensure that the State of Florida was made aware of CFHC's significant milestone. Organizational Advancement Director Angela Strain attended



the event to present CEO Gaye Williams with a letter from Governor Charlie Crist. Strain read a section of Gov. Crist's letter to the assembled crowd: “I wish you ever success in the coming years, and know that through community partners such as Central Florida Health Care, our State will continue to make great strides towards access to primary and preventative health care for all Floridians.”

*\*Article submitted by Central Florida Health Care and originally published in Dec. 2007 edition of Strategic Connection.*

## Hardee County Receives CATCH Results

The Comprehensive Assessment for Tracking Community Health (CATCH) was updated in August 2007, from an earlier version issued in 2001. The purpose of this study, funded by the BOCC, was to characterize the health status of the residents of Hardee County and to identify areas of strength as well as opportunities for improvement,

and to prioritize those ‘challenge’ areas. Overall, the 2007 Hardee County CATCH report indicates measurable improvement since 2001. Over half of the indicators (52.5%) are now better than the peer and state values, compared to only 47.3% in 2001. Conversely, those indicators unfavorable to peer and state values decreased

from 34.0% to 27.8%. These improvements were not limited to one or two categories of indicators. Rather there appears to be a general improvement across most categories. The survey was conducted and results were presented by the assessment and evaluation team of Dr. James Studnicki and Dr. Jim Fischer from the Univer-

sity of North Carolina Charlotte's Department of Health Behavior and Administration. Dr. Studnicki paid Hardee County quite the compliment when he said, “I don't know what you are doing but you should bottle it.”

*Article submitted by Erin Hess, Hardee County Health Department*



## DeSoto County Health Department Recognized for Excellence

The DeSoto County Health Department was notified by the Ft. Myers Field Office, Bureau of Immunization in late February, 08 that they have exceeded the

state immunization coverage goals of 90% for those children who receive the vaccine series by 24 months of age. The Arcadia clinic has a coverage level of 95% or

greater in 2007. Many kudos go to the Health Department staff for their recognition of this great program!

*\*Article submitted by DeSoto County Health Department*

## *Network Receives \$35,000 Technology Grant For Homeless Information Services*

Heartland Rural Health Network recently received acknowledgement that they have been awarded a \$35,000 grant from the Sisters of Bon Secours USA to support the expansion of the Homeless Management Information System that is a project facilitated by Florida's Heartland Rural Consortia for the Homeless, Inc. (FHRCH). FHRCH covers six rural counties: Hardee, Highlands, DeSoto, Hendry, Glades, and Okeechobee. This six county Continuum of Care (CoC) has been utilizing the ServicePoint system, a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) since 2006. This system, currently operational in all of FHRCH's

consortia counties with the exception of Okeechobee, is able to determine unduplicated numbers of homeless and chronically homeless populations, the needs of the homeless populations, how long and/or how often people are/become homeless, the local causes of the homeless in our rural areas, and the resources that are underutilized/used/or needed by this population. The HMIS system allows providers to maintain a centralized eligibility system to track client activity, estimate costs of services rendered, and case manage clients. The development of this program is in its 'infancy stage' and the future of this program

calls for visual client identification, acceleration of provider data input, and visually linking providers together among FHRCH's six counties. This grant will provide funding to hire a Part Time System Administrator who can focus on enhancing this system so it operates to its fullest potential with the goal of installing web cameras, bar code scanner/readers to provide a more effective means of providing services to the homeless and those at-risk of becoming homeless. In the most recent Point In Time Survey there are an estimated 3,500 homeless in FHRCH's six county area. The bar code reader/scanner also keeps track of services pro-

vided to clients and helps deter duplication of services which helps providers keep their costs down. The ServicePoint HMIS system aims to alleviate individuals' difficulties and complications caused by the inability to acquire necessary health care services, social services, and housing services due to financial constraints by making access to such services more readily accessible via technological advances such as the web cameras and ID cards for services. The grant is expected to begin in mid Spring and will occur through 2009. For more information on the ServicePoint system please call 863-402-0073.

## *Network Receives Funding For Vision Services & Education*

In 2007, Heartland Rural Health Network, in collaboration with the Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA), received a \$10,000 grant from the National Eye Institute to implement the only vision safety education curriculum produced that is geared towards children ages 2-5. RCMA successfully reached 350 total low-income children in three rural counties (Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto Counties) who attended one of 14 different Head Start schools in these counties (74 in DeSoto; 79 in Hardee; and 197 in Highlands). A total of 145 parents received vision safety education at various parent meetings and a total of 48 staff were involved in the implementation and/or teaching the curriculum. The implementation of this vision safety curriculum was so successful that

HRHN received a \$10,000 renewal of the grant for 2008-2009. This year the Network will purchase puppets, books, games, and craft supplies that can be used to enhance this vision safety program for RCMA's children.

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 In addition to the educational component of vision safety the Network received some funding to help support vision screenings for underserved children through RCMA. RCMA, through various funding sources, provides vision screening but often times children require follow-up screenings or even eye wear which, if the parents do not have financial re-



**Florida Rural Health Association Annual Meeting**

**June 11-13, 2008**

**Hyatt Regency Bonaventure Conference Center & Spa**

**Weston, Florida**

**To register visit [www.frha.org](http://www.frha.org)**

sources can be costly. Through some FLEX grant dollars, the Network can help with the costs of the follow-up vision screenings and eye wear. This has been a much needed program in our rural communities. For more information contact the Network staff at 863-452-6530.

## *A Powerful Story from Samaritan's Touch Care Center*

A woman in her early twenties, pregnant with her first child, came to Samaritan's Touch Care Center (STCC) in Sebring, FL for care. As they began to treat her uncontrolled diabetes they also referred her to Dr. Ron Sevigny, who, with Drs. Terry Johnson & Mark Sevigny, staff STCC's monthly eye clinic. Dr. Sevigny declared she had "the worst retinopathy" he had ever seen and was at risk of sudden blindness. It's hard to imagine a woman so young, preg-



nant with first child, suddenly going blind. Dr. Sevigny recruited Dr. David Misch and his

colleagues at Vitreous & Retina Consultants, who began donating aggressive weekly retina treat-

ments. Seven weeks later, her eyesight had stabilized at 20/25 and 20/40...almost perfect vision! This is just one of the many wonderful outcomes that STCC has brought to the Heartland. STCC, which opened in May, 2007, is a clinic for medically-indigent families and individuals with no health insurance. Many local and nearby health care facilities donate services and staff to STCC. For more information on the clinic or to volunteer please contact Diana Furr, Executive Director, at 863-471-1870.

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## *Network Continues To Provide Health Care Vouchers To The Homeless and At-Risk Populations*

The Network has grant dollars available through June 30, 2008 to help individuals needing to see a health care professional and who do not have any health care insurance. These grant dollars were made available through the Florida Department of Children & Families, Office on Homelessness Grant In



Aid. To be eligible the client must be a resident of Highlands or Hardee Counties; have no health care insurance; be

living at or below 200% FPL; and be willing to visit one of the participating providers in the voucher program. If a client is determined eligible through this screening process they will be issued a voucher that can be redeemed on the day of their appointment. The Network is working with Central Florida Health Care, the Highlands and Har-

dee County Health Departments, Marge Brewster Center, Tri County Human Services, and Samaritan's Touch. If you know of a patient or individual who needs to see a doctor, dentist, or mental health professional and they meet the basic eligibility requirements please call the Network office at 863-452-6530. The Network would like to thank the participating health care providers for their continued support of this voucher program. Since this program began in 2004 over 2,000 vouchers have been issued.

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## *Central Florida Health Care Opens Lakeland Primary Care Center*

Central Florida Health Care, Lakeland Regional Medical Center, and the Polk HealthCare Plan proudly opened the Lakeland Primary Care Center on November 1, 2007. The new location near downtown Lakeland represents a unique partnership, bringing together the resources and commitment of CFHC and LRMC with funding from the Polk County

HealthCare Plan. The Center's purpose and mission is "to increase access to primary care services to low income and uninsured residents and to serve as a medical home for people in the Lakeland community," according to Gaye Williams, CEO of Central Florida Health Care Inc. This partnership is expected to be a true benefit to the community, said

Jack Stephens, CEO of Lakeland Regional Medical Center. Central Florida Health Care also operates clinics in Dundee, Frostproof, Avon Park, and Wauchula and is committed to integrating the delivery of primary care services with aggressive outreach, education, counseling, translation, transportation and other needed social services.

## Two Florida Rural Health Fellows Graduate From NRHA Program

The National Rural Health Association's (NRHA) Rural Health Fellows program is a year long, intensive program aimed at developing leaders who can articulate a clear and compelling vision for rural America. Two rural health leaders representing Florida—Kelly J. Johnson, Health Planning Director at Heartland Rural Health Network, Inc. and Patricia K. Dobbins, Executive Community Health Nursing Director at the Hendry & Glades County Health Department—were selected from more than 60 applicants from across the country to participate in the inaugural 2007 Fellows Program. A total of 14 Fellows went through this Rural Health Fellows program. The NRHA partnered with Healthcare Performance Solutions, which has a proven track record for training rural healthcare providers to become leaders and worked closely with the NRHA in implementing the content for the Rural Health Fellows Program. A key component of the program included a Leadership Multi-rater Assessment of Personality (LMAP). The LMAP provided an assessment of each Fellows' intentions and effects as a leader. Another component of the Fellows program was the Action Learning Team projects

which were facilitated to build critical skills in three primary domains: 1) personal, team, and organizational leadership; 2) health policy analysis and advocacy and 3) NRHA governance and structure. There were three teams which made up the Action Learning Teams. Each Action Learning Team examined NRHA's structure, program, and policies to evaluate and learn more about the NRHA. Through these team analyses suggestions were made to the NRHA by Fellows on areas that could be enhanced or modified to better meet the needs of the organization and its members. The Fellows had the opportunity to go to Anchorage, Alaska in May, 2007, for the NRHA Annual Conference. They were able to present their first phase projects to several of the NRHA Board members and staff.

There was a second phase of the Action Learning Team projects that the Fellows

had an opportunity to present at the NRHA Policy Institute in Washington, DC. during the last week of January, 2008. Teams were able to address various rural health issues—Patricia's team focused on evaluating the Rural Health Fellows Program while Kelly's team presented a Mentorship Model for rural health professionals. A small graduation ceremony was held after the presentations and Fellows were presented with a Certificate. For more information on the program and how to apply visit [www.nrha.org](http://www.nrha.org)



A group of NRHA Rural Health Fellows celebrates their graduation from the program over dinner in Washington, DC.

## DeSoto Memorial Hospital Introduces Expansion To Public

On January 12, 2008 local residents got their first look at DeSoto Memorial Hospital's new state-of-the-art, \$20 million addition during a gala showcase. Nurses and doctors guided residents on a tour through the first floor of the hospital's two-story addition, which includes an emergency room, numerous operating rooms, and a post-anesthesia care unit. The new ER has 19 patient rooms with cutting edge equipment compared to the previous 8 beds in previous ER area.

Clinical Nursing Director, Bev Winston, was quoted in the DeSoto Sun Herald as stating, " (The new building) is more energy-efficient than the old-building, and more geared toward patient flow and patient safety. And we have a fast-track, minor illness area, better able to take care of patients; it's more streamlined." From the new lobby friends and loved ones can watch a patient's progress



from a flat-screen TV in the ER which shows information about where a patient is,

whether a doctor or nurse is in the room, and how a patient is being treated. The

second floor expansion includes a new medical-surgical unit and 32 private patient rooms. The expansion was financed with a 30 year, \$20 million, low interest loan from the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Develop-

ment. The hospital broke ground back in May, 2006 and the hospital now encompasses a spacious 146,000 square feet—56,000 more than it's previous size. The additional square footage provides the public with a more comfortable feel. As quoted in the Sun Herald, Kathryn Hill, a member of the hospital's board of directors commented that between attracting new doctors and the top of the line facility the expansion will be an all-around plus for the community.

Information taken from DeSoto Sun Herald published on 1/13/08.



## Health Department Director Heading To Broward County

Dr. Paula Thaqi was the Director of the Highlands County Health Department for the last seven years. She recently tendered her resignation after accepting a similar position in Broward County.

Thaqi's last day as Director of the Highlands County Health Department was April 11.

In an article recently published in the Highlands Today Dr. Thaqi stated she was honored to work with incredible health department and county staff to "promote, protect and improve the health of the community."

During Thaqi's seven-year tenure, the local department's budget increased from \$4 million to \$7.3 million per year. Thaqi supervised 115 employees in Highlands County. As director of the Broward County Health Department, she will oversee 700 employees.

She said working in the county was a "wonderful experience," while Broward County promises to be a "difficult and different chal-

lenge."

Dr. Thaqi and her staff worked on many initiatives including, but not limited to:

- \* Community Health Improvement Planning Council (CHIP) - this council met starting in 2001, charged with planning and improvement.

- \* Hiring of a full-time county teenage pregnancy coordinator. Thaqi noted that Highlands County is 29th of 67 counties in teen pregnancy statewide.

- \* A new initiative to establish the non-profit Health Care Board of Highlands County, Inc., an outgrowth of the CHIP Council.

- \* Expanded access to children's dental services - a dental office for children was added in Lake Placid in February and in Sebring, services expanded from two to four dental chairs.

- \* Plans for a new Avon Park County Building will include medical, children's and WIC program offices near Avon Park Middle School and would be acces-

sible by walking residents.

- \* The county's 2004 disaster response and establishment of three special need shelters while providing 4,000 hepatitis infection injections during Hurricane Jeanne.

- \* Closing the Gap Program - a community outreach program with diabetes and heart disease programs.

- \* VERB program - promotes increased physical activity for 9-13 year olds.

An advertisement to attract a successor will soon be published. The process to hire a replacement might last more than two months, depending on the applicant pool.

Thaqi said the new director would likely place a larger emphasis on infant mortality, a rural health professional shortage, a tobacco prevention program and promoting the department's initiatives.

*Information taken from Highlands Today article published on May 20, 2008*



Presented by  
The Board of Directors  
To  
Paula Thaqi, M.D.  
In grateful appreciation for seven years of Outstanding Dedication, Commitment and Leadership to improving rural health care as a Director, Vice President and President of our organization  
  
2001-2008  
  
Heartland Rural Health Network, Inc.

## Network Saves Local Hospitals Big \$\$ on Telecommunication Costs

The Rural Health Care Program of the Universal Service Fund provides discounts to eligible rural health care providers for telecommunication services and monthly Internet service charges. This program is intended to ensure that rural health care providers pay no more for telecommunications costs in the provision of health care services than their urban counterparts pay. The level of support is contingent on the location and the types of services. Health care providers can save on services they already have, upgrade current services,

or install new services.

The Universal Services application process can deter many facilities from completing the applications but with determination and hard work it can be done. Heartland Rural Health Network, Inc. continues to assist two local rural not-for-profit hospitals through the Universal Services Fund application process for reduced telecommunications costs. Florida Hospital (has locations in Sebring, Lake Placid, and Wauchula) and DeSoto Memorial Hospital (Arcadia) have utilized the Universal Services Program since 2004 and have been able to enjoy a

significant savings on their telecommunications costs. With one hospital location in Hardee County and two locations in Highlands County, Florida Hospital has numerous telecommunications lines that cost in excess of \$100,000 per year without the assistance of the Universal Services program. Through their utilization of the Universal Services Program, Florida Hospital has saved over \$160,000.00 from Funding Year 2004 thru Funding Year 2007. DeSoto Memorial Hospital, with one location in Arcadia and one telecommunication line, has enjoyed a savings of \$5,500 from Funding Year 2004 thru 2007.





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## Healthy Start Coalition Announces New Changes

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J. Rudy Reinhardt, Network Executive Director

\*Vice President Position vacant until June 08 Board elections

As approved by the Healthy Start Coalition of Hardee, Highlands and Polk Counties' Board of Directors, the Coalition has recently implemented some organizational structure changes. These changes help enhance the work being done by the Coalition and it's staff. According to Mary Jo Plews, Executive Director of the Coalition, Holly Parker, former Associate Director, is now working part time for the Coalition, serving as Provider & Community Awareness Coordinator for Hardee and Highlands County. This change allows Holly to be more available to Coalition Community Partners and Providers in these two counties. Gloria Camacho, Community Awareness Coordina-



tor focuses on Spanish speaking and migrant populations in all three counties. Gloria provides additional support as needed for outreach events in Hardee and Highlands Counties.

The Coalition welcomes a new Associate Director, Deborah (Debi) Meade. Debi has a solid 30 years of experience with non profit organizations, including 20 years of non-profit management experience. She helped established a Healthy Start Coalition in

New Jersey and most recently served as Call Center Manager with 211 Tampa Bay Cares. Debi supervises Holly Parker and Gloria Camacho as well as Audra Fyock, Provider Liaison and Rene Mackey, Mom Care Coordinator.

In addition to staff supervision, Debi is also responsible for some contract management and Quality Assurance responsibilities.

In addition, Coalition Executive Director Mary Jo Plews is now supervising Terri Chambers, Polk County TPPA Coordinator; Terry Linderman, Office/Operations Manager.

If you'd like more information on the Coalition please call (863) 297-3043.