

# Expansion of Health Right services is goal

BY MARY WADE BURNSIDE  
TIMES WEST VIRGINIAN

FAIRMONT — Now that Milan Puskar Health Right's Fairmont satellite clinic has been operating for more than eight months, organizers can begin to think about expanding the days or at least the hours that the free clinic serves patients without insurance.

"What I'd like to do is find a volunteer physician to work beside our nurse practitioner on Thursdays and then look at the community support to see if we need another day," said Laura Jones, executive director of Milan Puskar Health Right in Morgantown. "It would be good to have evening hours because a lot of our patients are working."

According to statistics quoted by Jones, about 70 percent of people nationwide who do not have health insurance are employed in some capacity.

"Most of our clients are working and they have no health insurance," Jones said. "That can be part-time, full-time, low-wage jobs or jobs where they offer health insurance but the premiums that they take out of their paycheck are so high that they can't put gas in the car or pay their utilities."

These facts emerged Tuesday afternoon during an open house to celebrate the Fairmont satellite clinic, which began operating last February and has been serving patients from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Thursdays, utilizing two exam rooms and an office at the



PHOTO BY TAMMY SHRIVER

From left, Mary Schaefer, Carla Satterfield and Diane Green chat during the open house Tuesday afternoon for the Milan Puskar Health Right Fairmont satellite site at the Soup Opera. The building has dedicated two exam rooms, office space and a men's and women's restroom for the clinic.

Soup Opera at 425 Quincy St. in Fairmont.

State Sen. Roman Prezioso, D-Marion and chair of the Senate's Health and Human Resources committee, was in attendance, as was Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia, a member of the same committee in the House of Delegates as well as a member of the clinic's board of directors.

"I was surprised to hear you're only open one day a week," Prezioso said in remarks officials made before the official ribbon cutting took place. "Barbara and I are going to try to change that."

As of now, nurse practitioner Patty Hermosilla works on

Thursdays with the aid of a medical assistant who comes down from the main Milan Puskar Health Right clinic in Morgantown.

"It's wonderful that people who live closer to Fairmont can come to Fairmont instead of driving to Morgantown," Hermosilla said. "It saves them gas and it saves them time."

She also noted that if patients call ahead prior to Thursday, prescriptions can be filled at the Morgantown clinic and the medical assistant can bring them down to be picked up

during the Fairmont office's hours of operation.

The Fairmont site was opened with an \$80,000 endowment, money William Johnson donated to Christ Episcopal Church in Fairmont. Another \$20,000 of money he left to the church was used as seed money, said the Rev. Siobhán E. Patterson of Christ Episcopal Church.

In addition to those funds, the state of West Virginia gave Milan Puskar Health Right \$20,000 with a mandate to use the money to see more patients,

Jones said.

"We didn't have to use it to open a new satellite clinic, but that's what we chose to do," she said.

In addition to funds — Jones pointed out that the endowment can use contributions — the clinic needs a volunteer physician in order to expand hours of operation.

"We've been trying to get a volunteer provider since we opened," said business manager Diane Green.

The Soup Opera is open seven days a week year-round serving lunch, said director Shelia Skidmore. When the Soup Opera traded buildings with the Fairmont Community Development Partnership, one mandate was that eventually, some of the space be used for a free clinic.

"It's been wonderful," she said of Milan Puskar Health Right's presence. "It's something we always wanted to do."

Prezioso also thought the Soup Opera and a health clinic were a good fit.

"It's a one-stop shop," he said. "West Virginians are a proud people. Some are just less fortunate than others. For some people, it might be difficult to seek out services when you don't have the means for it. But they shouldn't be ashamed of it. Everyone has the right to health care."

E-mail Mary Wade Burnside at [mwburnside@timeswv.com](mailto:mwburnside@timeswv.com).

# BUSINESS