

## Clinic for uninsured poor dedicated

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As long as you are here ... following the dedication of the new Lebanon Health Clinic yesterday, Jeanne Arnold, R.N., checks patient Ed Braun's blood pressure. Braun was the clinic's first patient when it opened its doors on March 26; Arnold was his nurse. (Chris Sholly / Lebanon Daily News)

County officials, dignitaries and volunteers gathered yesterday for the dedication of Lebanon's first free health clinic for poor and homeless people.

Lebanon Health Clinic opened on March 26 at 135 S. Ninth St. and already has treated about 30 patients, officials said yesterday.

Dr. Tom Carmany, a board member of the Rescue Mission, said the idea for the clinic stemmed from a community-needs study done by the United Way of Lebanon County in 2005.

"It had identified that there may be as many as 11 to 13 percent uninsured people throughout Lebanon County," Carmany said.

After investigating the possibilities for starting its own nonprofit organization to operate a local clinic, the Rescue Mission decided to partner with Water Street Ministries in Lancaster, which has had a similar clinic — Water Street Health Services — in place since 1992, he said.

The local clinic is a satellite of Water Street Ministries, which provides Christian health services to people without access to these services.

Initially, the plans called for a small office space at the Rescue Mission for the clinic, but Carmany said Jeanne Arnold, a registered nurse and a local philanthropist along with husband Ed, opened new options for the group.

"She had tremendous energy for this project and a deep compassion for helping others," he said.

She offered the Rescue Mission the first floor of the South Ninth Street building, he said. The floor includes several patient rooms and an administrative office.

Arnold was the first nurse on duty when the clinic initially opened in March, Carmany said.

“It’s really been a wonderful experience for me, because a lot of beautiful things have happened in forming this clinic,” said Arnold, who in 2005 was honored by the Lebanon Daily News as its Citizen of the Year.

She acknowledged numerous people who have volunteered to help with the project.

Ed Braun, who was the first patient, spoke about his experience.

“The applause goes out to those who had the vision, those who helped to make the vision happen,” said the 45-year-old Lebanon man.

Braun said he helped do some of the work to get the clinic set up two months ago but then became the first patient. He was diagnosed with Type II diabetes and high blood pressure.

“If it had gone unchecked, I would very quickly, very easily went out into the work force, possibly had a stroke or heart attack with no insurance,” he said. That could have cost the county about \$50,000, he said. Because of the early detection, he said, he knew to lose weight and get his blood pressure under control.

“They never looked down at me,” he said. “They built me up.”

Gale Thomason, executive director of Water Street Ministries, said the Lebanon Health Clinic is one of three free clinics in the Susquehanna Valley and one of 1,200 across the nation.

She said about half the patients they have seen so far have said the poor economy is the reason they sought out the clinic.

So far, she said, the clinic has held eight three-hour sessions.

“We’ve impacted 31 individuals in two months who’ve had nowhere else to get help,” she said. “We’ve had 57 visits.”

The clinic will provide relief for the hospital emergency room, which then can serve patients who are sicker. The ER tends to be the place many uninsured people go to when they don’t know what else to do.

“I was an ER nurse for 20 years and saw that becoming an increasing problem,” she said.

The clinic is open to Lebanon County residents who are uninsured and have incomes that fall below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.

The clinic currently offers one session on Thursdays, but there are plans to expand the hours and services as more patients and volunteers come forth, Thomason said.

For more information, call 273-5802.