

Two women join forces, open clinic for the uninsured

By Charity Prater

Low-income adults have a difficult time finding healthcare if they are uninsured, but two women have joined together to build a health clinic that offers North and Northeast Portland residents just that.

Pastor Mary Overstreet and Dr. Jill Ginsberg are founders of North by Northeast Community Health Center, which offers free healthcare services to low-income adults. Since August 2006, the clinic has helped more than 1,200 patients get the medical treatment they desperately need and deserve.

Dr. Ginsberg bumped into Pastor Overstreet in November of 2005 after learning of her relief work after Hurricane Katrina. Pastor Overstreet sold her vacation residence to pay for the relocation of 40 families to Portland after they lost their homes in the storm. Hearing her story, Ginsberg, a medical doctor with Kaiser Permanente, felt inspired to lend a hand in aiding the poor in Portland.

"I asked Pastor Mary if I could help in any way and she said 'What we really need is a free health clinic for people living in this area,'" says Ginsberg.

"The healthcare system is a maze," says Ginsberg. "Patients are at a real disadvantage because many haven't gone through schooling or don't speak English. Most are quite knowledgeable about their conditions, but are lacking access to medications and supplies."

After donations were collected and non-profit status acquired, Ginsberg and Overstreet erected the clinic in a building that once housed a bakery, down the street from Overstreet's evangelical church. Since the launch, clinic staff and volunteer doctors have diagnosed a variety of cancers, treated hundreds of cases of high blood pressure and supplied numerous people with medications and medical



The challenge was at first intimidating for Ginsberg since she had no formal training in setting up a non-profit, acquiring the necessary funds or establishing a board of directors.

"I took a deep breath and told her that I'd give it a try," says Ginsberg. "Once I began to understand the different aspects of starting a non-profit and began to step over each individual hurdle, it was easier for me to keep going."

North by Northeast offers several medical services, including treatment for high blood pressure, diabetes and asthma. The clinic allows patients access to free medications, lab services and blood-sugar testing devices.

supplies.

The Portland community has stepped up to support the growing health center. Last year, more than 50 volunteers contributed more than 3,000 hours of service at the clinic. Local businesses and organizations, including the National Council of Jewish Women Portland Chapter, Black United Fund and Whole Foods Market have partnered with the organization. Legacy Health Systems donates lab services.

"Meeting Pastor Mary Overstreet changed my life," says Ginsberg. "I never would have envisioned being here today if I hadn't met her. Being able to help at-risk patients is becoming a larger part of my life."

Dr. Jill Ginsberg is one of the founders of North by Northeast Community Health Center. The other founder is Pastor Mary Overstreet.

- Photo by Charity Prater

The clinic focuses on adults between 18 and 64 years old, a demographic often the least capable of finding treatment. According to Ginsberg, the first thing people usually stop doing when they lose their health insurance is checking their blood sugar, creating a health risk.

The clinic treats about 100 patients each month. Some make appointments; others are walk-ins. Future plans at the clinic include

applying for a grant from the city of Portland to expand, so the center can serve more individuals and provide more doctors. The clinic is searching for more volunteer doctors to accommodate a growing number of patients.

For more information about North by Northeast Community Health Center, located at 4725 N. Williams Ave., visit www.nxneclinic.org or call (503) 287-4932.