Clayton County Receives Funding for New Primary Care Clinic
By: Gail Webb, Sue Chapman, and Casie Walker

The Board of Directors of the Southern Crescent Hospital for Specialty Care has agreed to fund the start-up of a “New Access Point” Primary Care Clinic in Lovejoy. The clinic will provide access to affordable healthcare services to approximately 115,000 uninsured and underinsured residents of Clayton County and surrounding areas.

When the Clayton County Archway Partnership Executive Committee was formed in 2008, one of the first priorities identified was community health, specifically greater access to affordable healthcare. To address that priority, the committee identified the need to establish additional Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers (FQHCs) in Clayton County and created a FQHC Project Team to lead the process.

The team worked on numerous tasks to achieve the final goal of becoming a FQHC with over 4,100 hours invested. Some activities included creating GIS maps to support Clayton County as an underserved community, developing a “Primary Care Physician Survey” used to gain insight from more than 250 Clayton County physicians, and conducting meetings with members of the State Office of Rural Health.

Numerous university students were involved in the research, data collection, and application process over the past three years, including undergraduate and graduate students from Clayton State University and The University of Georgia. Lauren Culp, a graduate assistant from UGA’s College of Public Health, assisted in researching vital information in order to obtain the grant needed to establish a FQHC. “I created a data sheet documenting vital statistics of Clayton County as well as its contiguous counties in order to identify disparities to be used in Clayton County’s Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) application,” she said. “I also identified contiguous counties’ utilization of primary care physicians and analyzed statistics in order to understand what type of primary care HPSA designation we should apply for.”

The work by the students was important since the original application was denied because it was determined that Clayton County did not meet the requirements for the HPSA due to demographics and the fact that surrounding counties were not considered to be over utilized from a primary physician standpoint. Achieving the full designation status of a HPSA would enhance federal funding, enhance the recruitment of physicians, and also support establishing additional FQHCs. Other students that were actively involved include Megan Gosch, and Natalie Arford, UGA’s Master of Public Health students, and Marcus Adams, a CSU graduate.

On June 7, 2012 Clayton County was designated as a low-income Primary Care HPSA which will allow the primary clinic in Lovejoy to operate as a full FQHC.

Dr. Alpha Bryan of the Clayton County Board of Health and member of the Archway Executive Committee said, “The opening of a FQHC in Clayton County represents a tremendous opportunity to improve health status for Clayton's underserved populations. The new FQHC will provide comprehensive primary care services and meet an enormous gap in healthcare services here in the community. This is exciting!”

Lovejoy was selected as the location for the clinic because of the high concentration of low income residents, lack of easy access to affordable healthcare, and a move-in ready building. There will be a total initial investment of $200,000 and the renovations to the facility will begin in July 2012.

Jim Crissey, President and CEO of Southern Regional Medical Center and member of the Archway Executive Committee, said “This achievement was most noteworthy in the fact that this was the original goal set by the FQHC team of the Clayton Archway Partnership almost three years ago.”

Advancing Community Priorities: One of the first priorities identified in Clayton County was community health, specifically greater access to affordable healthcare. With the help of the Archway Partnership’s FQHC Project Team, Clayton County was designated as a low-income dental HPSA and now is designated as a low-income Primary Care HPSA. Providing additional access to affordable healthcare is a great accomplishment for the community thanks to the commitment and continued efforts of the Clayton County Archway Partnership.