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# Good Samaritan clinic to celebrate 25th anniversary

By [Carl Orth](#)



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Good Samaritan Health Clinic will celebrate its 25th anniversary next week of providing free health care.

NEW PORT RICHEY — When the federal Affordable Care Act was enacted in 2010, the people who run the Good Samaritan Health Clinic of Pasco wondered if there would even be a need for the free health care the clinic dispenses.

As next week's 25th anniversary event attests, Good Samaritan Clinic still fills the needs of many low-income residents who can't afford health insurance but don't qualify for government health coverage such as Medicaid.

The nonprofit organization will hold an open house and mixer 5:30-7:30 p.m. Thursday, April 9, at the clinic, 5334 Aspen St. The West Pasco Chamber of Commerce is helping with the festivities.

Good Samaritan opened its doors in 1990, in a small house along Grand Boulevard in the Holiday area near his residence, according to registered nurse Jerry Boise. Boise began volunteering at the clinic nearly 19 years ago. By that time it had moved to a doublewide trailer at 4035 Thys Road, just north of State Road 54.

In September 2005, a \$900,000 federal grant the clinic received via Pasco County helped Good Samaritan officials move to the Aspen Street building, vacant after Florida Cancer Institute built in the River Crossing area, near the then-Community Hospital.

The clinic now has five paid staff members, four grant-funded staffers and 80 volunteers, //according to CEO Melissa Fahy.

“We’ve come a long way in 25 years,” said Fahy, who came on board nearly nine years ago.

Even with the health insurance exchanges the ACA has created, “there’s still a huge need for free health care, Fahy said.

Even with the ACA’s federal subsidy, health insurance still remains out of reach for many people, Tina Shelton, development director for Good Samaritan, said. A woman who works as a nail technician told her health care coverage through the ACA would still cost more than she owns, Shelton said.

Some people are taking the tax penalty when they go without health insurance, Shelton said. Good Samaritan uses 200 percent of poverty level as the cutoff threshold for eligibility for health care at the clinic. Patients must be Pasco residents and U.S. citizens.

A Good Samaritan patient, Vernon Patten, said he has been retired since he lost his job at 61 and couldn’t find another. “I kind of got stuck in a rut between a rock and a hard place,” he said.

Patten and wife Karla, who also lost her job, had health insurance all their working careers. When they applied for insurance via the federal exchange, the cost was nearly \$1,200 a month.

“Give me a break,” Patten said. “I don’t even make \$10,000 a year. All I’ve got is Social Security.”

Patten turned to Good Samaritan for help the past few years. He was consulting last week with Thais R. Forbes, a board certified family nurse practitioner at the clinic.

“We’re keeping an eye on my sugar level, and the neuropathy and my gout,” Patten explained. “Keep an eye on the blood pressure.”

He has had tended to procrastinate getting health care, so Good Samaritan is keeping him on track, Patten said.

Patients can sense the upbeat mood of volunteers, Fahy said. Volunteers are “here because they want to be. Their hearts are in the right place. I think this place is very blessed.”

“I love the place,” said Franci Lewandowski, who began volunteering about a year and a half ago. “I love working with people. I love bringing health care to the underserved community. There’s always work to be done. There’s always patients.”

Clifford Colin, a cardiologist at Regional Medical Center Bayonet Point who volunteers at Good Samaritan, presented a gift to Fahy. The framed painting shows a monkey on the back of a smoker. Fahy pledged to hang it up on a clinic wall. “We are always trying to get our patients to quit smoking,” Fahy remarked.

R.N. Boise, who has been volunteering since 1996. no longer sees patients at Good Samaritan but concentrates on getting help to people referred to the clinic. Besides Good Samaritan, Boise also helps at a cold night shelter and a faith-based food pantry program in Tarpon Springs.

“If you were to add up all the hours he has given us, it would be an astronomical number,” Fahy said about Boise.

But it takes a lot to keep the clinic running, Fahy emphasizes.

Good Samaritan uses a \$470,000 operating budget. Cardiologist Stephen Goldman, founder and chairman of the Good Samaritan board, and pulmonologist Bharat Desai, the clinic's medical director, are among leaders who appreciate the mission of the clinic.

"We're really connecting all those health-care dots," Fahy said about working with specialists, offering dental care and partnering with other nonprofit agencies.

A new grant in December enabled Good Samaritan to hire Shelton as the development director to raise awareness, boost an office manager to full time and bring on a board a scribe who helps doctors with health-care paperwork.

The \$57,000 grant came through Florida Association of Free and Charitable Clinics, which in turn gets \$4.5 million from the state.

This is the first year that Fahy presented a "non-deficit" budget to the Good Samaritan board, in large part to Shelton's efforts. Lobbyists are working to renew the Good Samaritan grant from the state association each year.

"Let's cross our fingers," Fahy said about renewal of the grant that expires at the end of June.

"We don't have any federal or state funding" directly to Good Samaritan, Shelton underscored.

Morton Plant North Bay Foundation is Good Samaritan's largest corporate donor, at \$100,000. Medical Center of Trinity also provides a lot of in-kind help.

Nurses Gala in May raises \$65,000 to \$80,000 in net proceeds. Festival of Trees at Christmas time provides about \$20,000 more to the budget.

Pasco County last week earmarked \$48,000 from federal block grant funds to Good Samaritan to help buy medicines for the pharmacy and pay for laboratory work. New pharmacy director Raj Mehta will be able to restock shelves of medicines that look relatively "barren" right now, Fahy said.

Shelton has spoken at a Holiday Rotary in an effort to get other business grants.

Community groups also lend a hand. A Knights of Columbus council here raised about \$500 from a fish fry for the clinic. Hacienda Village Mobile Home Park staged a senior talent show to donate \$1,000 to Good Samaritan.

Good Samaritan in recent years has logged a marginal decrease in the number of patients visits, but an increase in people applying for help, Fahy said. "Lower numbers, but they're coming to us sicker."

"There are still miles to go," Fahy wrote in the clinic's newsletter. "We have left a footprint in the sand in Pasco County. Please join us in making a difference to these folks that just need a helping hand."

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