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Surgeon General gets firsthand look at Mission of Mercy

Thursday, Jan. 12, 2006

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by Sherry Greenfield
Staff Writer

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Since 1994, Mission of Mercy has been providing health care services to the uninsured, working poor and the homeless in Arizona, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

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In Frederick County, the faith-based nonprofit agency provides free medical and dental services in Brunswick, Frederick, Mount Airy and Thurmont.

“We’re celebrating 14 years now,” said Gianna Talone-Sullivan, Mission of Mercy founder. “I never thought we would get to this point. We’re in three states and about 40 countries.”

Mission of Mercy is a nonsectarian charity whose goal is to restore dignity to the sick, poor and homeless, regardless of faith, color or ethnic origin. The program uses active and retired licensed volunteer medical workers to provide free healthcare and free prescription medications to those who have no insurance.

Sullivan praised her program

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during a visit from U.S. Surgeon General Vice Admiral Richard Carmona Monday at the Frederick Church of the Brethren. Carmona was invited to tour the City of Frederick clinic site and the mobile clinic van, which provides more extensive medical services.

“Our whole philosophy is restoring dignity to ordinary people who don’t have a face or a voice,” Sullivan said. “This is what we do.”

This philosophy of providing free medical and dental services to those in need, is what persuaded Carmona to visit the Frederick facility after an invitation from Sullivan.

“...The only clearance to come here is a need,” Carmona told the crowd of local health workers and Mission of Mercy staff at a reception after the tour. “What’s dispensed here is love and caring... the only reason you’re here is caring and the love for people who don’t have a voice. All colors are welcome... and you do your best to level the playing field.”

Born and raised in New York City, Carmona said he grew up poor and understands what it is like not to have adequate health care.

“This is special to me, not only because I’m the Surgeon General but when I was 6 years old and homeless, we didn’t have health care,” he said.

Preceding his statements, Carmona took a tour of the clinic, located in the basement of the church. Carmona chatted with health care workers and in Spanish, conversed with several of the patients.

He showed particular interest in the services the clinic provides to pregnant women.

“Seventy-eight percent of birth defects are preventable with vitamins and good food,” he said.

Sullivan hopes through not only Carmona’s visit, but their own efforts, Mission of Mercy will expand to other areas in the country.

“We hope it duplicates itself all over the world and we hope it expands,” she said.

Clinic locations:

- * Frederick Church of the Brethren, 201 Fairview Ave., Frederick; 301-631-2673
- * Calvary United Methodist Church, 403 S. Main St., Mount Airy; 301-829-0358
- * Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church, 103 N. Church St., Thurmont; 301-631-2673
- * Trinity Church of God, 1200 N. Maple Ave., Brunswick; 301-834-7381

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