

Vital Signs

Health Care Is A Right, Not A Privilege

The Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland

In Memory of Dr. Louis Zabell



awaiting them. But "Lou" never wanted patients to be fearful or anxious when seeing him; he wanted to care for them and make them comfortable. His explanations to each patient as his/her procedure progressed were frequent and honest, but gentle and calming. Just as important, "Lou" wanted patients to learn how to take care of their teeth so that future visits were not necessary. His motto as a dentist was always "to put himself out of business."

To the staff and so many in The Free Clinic family, Lou was a remarkable man, a delight to know and a shining example of a "mensch," a true human being. We offer our condolences to his wife of 52 years, Joyce, his children Stephen and Marcie, and his many grandchildren. He is missed.

The Clinic is sad to note the passing of one of its founders and most treasured volunteers, Dr. Louis Zabell, who was passionate about health care access for all. Dr. Zabell passed away on December 17, 2003, after a long and heroic struggle with cancer.

"Lou" was a volunteer at the Free Clinic for over two decades and a member of the Board. For his work at The Free Clinic, he was recognized as one of the Most Treasured Volunteers for 1991 by the Federation for Community Planning. Dr. Zabell was a co-founder and for decades, the anchor dentist of The Free Dental Clinic. He was a gifted professional in the field of dentistry, which was his vocation, avocation, justification for life, and passion. For the hundreds of volunteer dental students who served under him, Dr. Zabell was an excellent teacher and role model.

Over its existence, The Free Clinic's dental services have generally been restricted to extractions. Patients come to us not only in pain, but often in fear of the procedure

Wish List

- Television and VCR
- Portable air conditioning unit
- Video Cassettes on health-related topics
- Copy Machine
- Paper 8½ x 11 (white)
- Pens (black and blue)
- Pencils
- Highlighters
- Manilla Folders
- Paper Clips
- Envelopes – (plain, all sizes)
- Staples
- Thick rubber bands
- Heavy-duty, extra-wide wheelchairs
- Scrub machine for the floors
- Parking cones

Come Out and Show Your Support for The Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland

Join The Free Clinic for Happy Hour on Friday, March 26, 2004, at The Blind Pig Speakeasy, 1228 W. 6th Street. An admission of \$10 will buy you unlimited draft beer from 6:00 - 9:00!

Save the Date
for our Annual Event
at Cedar Lee
June 13, 2004
See page 5 for more details

*For more information, please contact:
Stacey Rubinfeld, (216) 707-3525*

**Help Keep the "Free" in
The Free Clinic!**

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Steve Weirich Vigil Speech



Dr. Steve Weirich

Because I had volunteered at the Free Clinic for 15 years before I joined the staff, I felt I was joining this organization with my “eyes wide open.” However, knowing now what I know and experiencing what I have seen over the past 15 months, I confess that I was terribly naïve when it came to the realities of how our health care system treats our neighbors, relatives and friends who have no health insurance.

I had heard the speeches of the political pundits that claimed many American seniors on fixed incomes often had to choose between eating and paying rent OR acquiring their needed medications. Before, a part of me felt that a lot of this was just rhetoric, you know, political “hoo-hah” being used as a scare tactic and a vote-getter. But now, I have names and faces for these unfortunate people that had previously been nameless and faceless to me. And now I realize that the situation for too many of our seniors is even worse than what I thought it was before. At the Free Clinic, we see hundreds of elderly people, most who had worked long and hard and are now retired, and their only income is their \$600-800 a month Social Security check, and they really need medications that cost between \$100 to \$400 a month. While these people all have Medicare Part B health insurance, Medicare doesn’t pay a cent for these medications, and even with the Medicare reform that was just enacted within the past couple of weeks in Washington, Medicare won’t pay a cent for several more years.

Before, I didn’t really think a lot about what happened to people after they had been released from prison. I had assumed that after a person had finished their parole that their debt to society had been paid. Now, with close to 50% of the patients that we see at the Free Clinic having a felony record, I realize that in the state of Ohio while a person is incarcerated he or she has medical care...the quality of that care varies from prison to prison throughout the state. But upon release, that person is given between two days and two weeks of medications and essentially instructed to fend for themselves. So here we have men and women with many chronic, potentially life-threatening medical conditions who are unemployed, often unemployable, uninsured and uninsurable who are scrambling to find housing, food, stay clean and sober, meet the requirements of their parole, and pick up the pieces of their lives. Treatment for their medical conditions takes a secondary or tertiary priority. It isn’t until these men and women have gone without their medications for weeks, often months, and sometimes years, and when they can no longer ignore the symptoms of their medical conditions that have now appeared, when they find their way to places like our Free Clinic. It wouldn’t be so bad if many of these medical conditions were not so dependent on ongoing treatment...conditions like hypertension, diabetes, thyroid disorders, psychiatric illnesses, Hepatitis C, and HIV. We may want to think that upon release from prison these people have “paid their debt to society,” but I now have witnessed firsthand how that term is just rhetoric. These people have been brandished as “ex-felons,” a term that they will never be able to overcome. Is it little wonder that the rates for these ex-felons to re-offend and go back to prison are so high? I am surprised that it is not higher.

Every health care system in our city, and we are blessed to have some of the best hospitals and doctors in the world, states that they provide care to our region’s indigent people. I hear quoted rates that range between 15-60% of the patients seen at different hospitals are indigent. No hospital will turn away a patient because of inability

to pay. However, those indigent patients are by and large proud people. Once a person has lost a job, and lost their health insurance coverage, they won’t go back to their doctors at one of the hospitals or in private practice because they know that they can’t afford the care. So most of these people go without health care, and stop taking their medications. People seek their health care at emergency rooms when their conditions are at a crisis level, and they rotate between multiple emergency rooms so they won’t rack up a huge bill at any one place. At the emergency room, they are evaluated, treated, perhaps admitted for a while until their condition is stabilized or until the DRG has been met. Then they are discharged with prescriptions in hand often for the latest, and greatest, and most expensive medications, and instructed to get these prescriptions filled at a local pharmacy and to “follow up with their PCP in a few days.” It seems that too often little consideration is given to what medications are prescribed, and for those patients who are out of work, with no income, and no health insurance even a \$5.00 prescription might as well be a \$150 prescription because each is equally unaffordable. Even less consideration is given to help these patients on discharge from the emergency room or the hospital find a PCP if they don’t have one, or can’t afford to go to the one that they have seen before. A few of the lucky ones find their way to the Free Clinic’s door.

In my professional life before joining the Free Clinic staff I was working in the for-profit world of health care for large government agencies and private corporations. A large part of what I did was preventive medicine. I learned and witnessed firsthand that there is more bang for your health care dollars in preventing the onset of chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, obesity, HIV, and chronic lung disease, than in treating these conditions after they have become manifested. In fact, I even spoke on numerous occasions and taught at the Medical School, that in many respects the battle has been lost after a condition is diagnosable. But now, in my life at the Free Clinic we have little time to actually talk

(continued on page 5)

Thoughts from Gail

In past issues of *Vital Signs*, I have shared with you how more and more, our patient population is being made up of the working poor. But who are these people? What are their concerns? How does The Free Clinic meet or not meet their needs?

Statistics say that there may be 35 MILLION people in this country meeting the definition of individuals employed part-time or full-time, yet falling below the Federal Poverty Guidelines. At least half of these individuals are single, African-American women who are heads of households with children. Many of these women came off the welfare rolls to take one or more minimum wage positions and have now lost their Medicaid benefits. But, the working poor are a diverse and often familiar group.

Here are some of the stories of others:

- Former middle managers and long-time workers induced or feeling forced to take early retirement, now unable to find another satisfactory job. Years from Medicare eligibility, their payout bonus is diminishing and their health insurance benefits have run out. They cannot afford health insurance premiums, even if it can be purchased through their former employer via COBRA. Some have been out of work so long that they are no longer covered by COBRA.
- Blue collar, middle class and sometimes, even upper middle class workers who have lost their jobs through downsizing, corporate mergers, and corporate exits from town. Others have lost their jobs to offshoring—the transfer of jobs to other countries where wages and benefits are lower. Their funds are dwindling, their expenses can be



high and their job prospects are stalled waiting for this recovery to translate into new jobs.

- Students. These individuals fall into two distinct groups. One group includes individuals who are retraining. They have part-time jobs to get by, but can't afford much else. The second group includes recent graduates who have education but cannot compete with more experienced individuals for the diminishing number of openings in their chosen career. Many of these individuals are studying for a graduate or other degree. Neither group can afford health insurance and in the latter case, they cannot be carried on their parent's policy.
- Men coming out of prison, many on drug-related charges that have been elevated to felony status not levied against people committing more violent crimes! Frequently, members of this group lack skills or previous legal work histories, these individuals are virtually unemployable in a down economy.
- Immigrants who are in this country both legally and illegally.

The working poor present some of the greatest challenges to our providers. While many are acutely ill, they often bring multiple, chronic health problems requiring return visits and high cost medications. Some of these individuals

have waited so long to seek care that they come to us with high blood pressures and blood sugars, requiring significant skill and vigilance to bring them back to normal. Many patients are not only ill—they are scared and dispirited. We offer them mental health counseling, but our waiting list for service can put their first visit off for months.

The most frustrating part of dealing with this population is that for all our efforts, we know that at best, all we currently do is bring these people back to a baseline of wellness that allows them to keep plugging away at their situation. While for some the life challenge is temporary, for far too many of our patients there is no end to their desperate situation. That is why The Free Clinic is starting to reach out to partner with a range of agencies, for health without hope is mere survival. And our country's founding documents call for far more: "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Gail E. Bromley

Gail Bromley
Executive Director

NEW PROGRAMS AT THE FREE CLINIC

Several new patient-oriented programs have been thriving at the Free Clinic within the past fifteen months.

Thanks to two remarkable physical therapists, Amanda Johnson and Scott Uhle, and **physical therapy** students from Cleveland State University, we now offer physical therapy evaluations and treatment for patients on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

Dr. Mel Shafron, former chief of neurosurgery at the Mt. Sinai Medical Center, has been donating his time and amazing talents on Tuesday evenings for a **neurology clinic**, evaluating our patients with seizure disorders, back pain, severe headaches, and other neurologic disorders.

Dr. Lisa Navracruz, a fellow in the Department of Family Medicine at University Hospitals concentrating on **adolescent health**, has graciously added an additional day of services to our Teen Clinic. We now see patients aged 13 to 18 on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Dr. Rina Lazebnik, an Adolescent Medicine Specialist at Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital at University Hospitals continues to offer her wonderful leadership to our Teen Clinic, as she has done for the past eleven years.

Five amazing **pulmonary** specialists from the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, Drs. Dan Culver, Marie Budev, Rena Mehra, Tom Gildea, and David Holden, and three respiratory therapists, Kevin McCarthy, Nancy Kurakowa, and Gloria Rhodes have organized a much needed and extremely busy pulmonary clinic on Monday nights.

Wendy Lemere, R.N., N.P., from the Foley Elder Health Center of University Hospitals of Cleveland, is coming monthly to perform **comprehensive evaluations** on our elderly patients exhibiting signs and **symptoms of dementia**.

Thanks to the efforts of many individuals, we have been able to offer several **patient education classes on Nutrition**, covering nutritional efforts that combat hyperlipidemia, diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and cardiovascular diseases. In addition, we have a wonderful relationship with the good people at Project Chase and St. Vincent's Charity Hospital to provide comprehensive diabetes education free-of-charge for our diabetic patients.

In support of The Free Clinic's mission "to advocate for policy changes that make health care available to all" we have collaborated with the NAACP, SPAN, and America Coming Together to encourage voter registration by our patients while they are waiting to be seen during our open evening clinic on many evenings.

Many thanks to all of these amazing and generous people and organizations who have enabled The Free Clinic to expand our service offerings to our patients and clients.



Steve Weirich Vigil Speech *(continued from page 2)*

about preventive health care. Too much time, money and energy are consumed at trying to put out, or at least diminish the raging fires of full-blown disease processes.

Preventive health care is increasingly becoming another luxury reserved only for those with health insurance.

Before the Free Clinic, I pitied homeless people, and injecting drug users, and sex workers. Now I treat many of these people, call many of them friends, and struggle with them to try and help them solve their problems, often times failing miserably. The least we can do for these people is offer them a momentary semblance of sanctuary in their lives while they are at the Free Clinic, and remind them that there are still people who love them, and that they are worthy of that love.

I have been on the staff at the Free Clinic long enough now to state with absolute conviction that:

Yes, there is a health care crisis in this country and in our state, and in our city. Yes, all people are worthy of access to health care. And, yes, I firmly believe that health care is a right and not a privilege.

Mark Your Calendar!

The Free Clinic Night at the Movies

Who: YOU! along with 250+ guests

What: The Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland's Night at the Movies – come enjoy some delectable eats at either Lopez or Jimmy O'Neill's before watching a movie of your choice at the Cedar Lee Theaters.

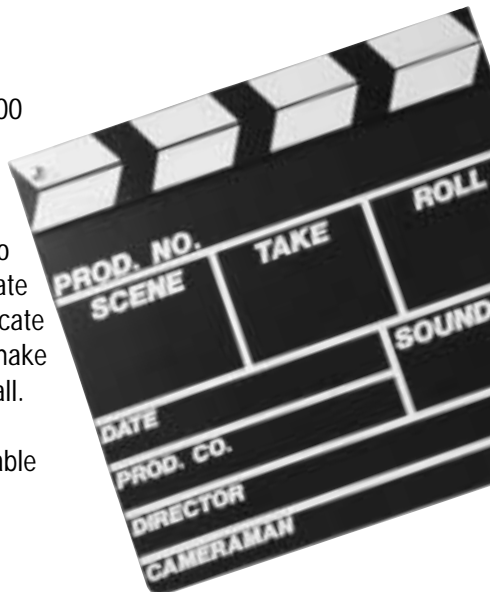
Where: Cedar Lee Movie Theaters, Lopez & Jimmy O'Neill's

When: Sunday, June 13, 2004
6:30 p.m.
Tickets: \$50.00 & \$100.00

Why: To provide quality health care and related services free of charge to those who lack appropriate alternatives, and to advocate for policy changes that make health care available to all.

Sponsorship Opportunities Available
Please contact David Wood at
440.585.9010 or
dwood@kirtlandcapital.com

For more information on the upcoming event
contact Stacey Rubenfeld 216.707.3525



Becky Bardash Tribute

Becky Bardash passed away in November 2003 after an illness she had borne with courage and determination.

Becky's contribution to the mental health department went far beyond the call of duty. Therefore, Becky was selected as mental health volunteer of the year in April 2003.

Becky joined our department in August 2001 as a PhD student to do her practicum, a requirement from University of Akron Counseling Psychology Department. Slowly Becky expanded her talents from individual therapy to becoming a trainer and assisting with our training program for hotline and intake workers. Becky had become so much part of our department that if a diagnostic assessment was required Becky offered to do it; she volunteered to counsel teens, saw urgent clients and substituted as intake supervisor.

Becky was young, energetic, warm, caring, dynamic, assertive and had extensive knowledge, which she enjoyed sharing. She touched many of the staff and volunteers by her courage and determination to face challenges with a positive attitude. Becky shared herself with us. For that I am grateful. Becky was a special person who touched me deeply – I admired and respected many of her qualities. It was a real privilege to be part of her growth and struggles. We will miss her.

Gail Kopelowitz
Mental Health Director



The Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland
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Cleveland, Ohio 44106
www.thefreeclinic.org

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Mission Statement

The mission of The Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland is to provide quality healthcare and related services free of charge to those who lack appropriate alternatives, and to advocate for policy changes that make healthcare available to all.

HELP KEEP THE FREE IN THE FREE MEDICAL CLINIC

Please complete this form and mail to:

The Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland
12201 Euclid Avenue,
Cleveland, Ohio 44106

Gift Amount _____ Check enclosed. (Please make all checks payable to The Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland.)

Please charge my credit card MasterCard VISA

Card # _____ Exp. Date _____

Pledge Amount _____ I will fulfill my pledge in _____ installments beginning _____.

(Please fulfill pledges by June 30, 2004)

- I am making a gift of securities
- I have included The Free Medical Clinic in my will
- Please contact me about planned giving opportunities
- My employer matches gifts. Enclosed is a matching gift form.

Name: Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Please list my name as follows in donor recognition materials _____