

Opening of the Saltville Regional Dental Clinic

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October 18, 2010

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Saltville, Virginia

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□□□□□□□□ I am pleased to join you in Saltville today in opening the new Saltville Regional Dental Clinic, a facility which will soon begin providing much needed affordable and convenient dental care to more than 3,000 patients each year across a six county region, regardless of their ability to pay.

A great need exists for affordable dental care in Southwest Virginia. A survey that was completed before the clinic's construction indicated that 85 percent of respondents had no dental insurance. In addition, 80 percent of our local dentists do not accept Medicaid and even fewer participate in the Family Access to Medical Insurance Security program.

Addressing this clear need for affordable dental care has been one of my highest priorities. To that end, I have been working with local officials and officials from Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems for several years to obtain the federal funds necessary to construct a regional dental clinic to serve the Mount Rogers area including Smyth, Wythe, Washington, Bland, Carroll and Grayson Counties and the City of Galax.

Our efforts were successful, and at my urging, a total of more than \$1.7 million in federal funding was secured for the construction of the new regional dental clinic here in Saltville.

I joined with many of you here today more than two years ago in announcing that at my urging the U.S. Department of Agriculture, through its Rural Development Agency, was providing a low-interest federal loan at my request of \$519,000 for the clinic. In addition, at my request the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded a federal Community Development Block Grant of \$700,000 for the construction of the clinic, the Appalachian Regional Commission provided \$200,000 and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provided \$300,000.

The total cost of the new clinic was \$1,857,000. The Virginia Community Health Care Association provided the \$138,000 for the complete cost of the clinic's construction.

As part of the project, the second floor of the former T.K. McKee Hospital building has been renovated to create a new regional dental clinic 6,000 square feet in size. The new clinic will provide dental hygiene and general dentistry services on a sliding-fee scale based on the patient's income.

The clinic is outfitted with a total of fifteen dental chairs. Other renovated space includes a laboratory, X-Ray, offices for the dentist and dental hygienist, a conference room, waiting room and restrooms.

The new dental clinic will partner with dental schools to provide services. Five dental chairs will be used by a private practice dentist, and ten dental chairs will be used by fourth year dental and dental hygiene students.

A permanent dentist on staff with Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems will oversee the program will supervise students who will provide dental hygiene and general dental services as a portion of their in-service education. The Dental School at Virginia Commonwealth University has committed to sending fourth-year dental students to see patients in the dental clinic. For three-quarters of the year, these fourth year dental and dental hygiene students will

complete assignments in Saltville that will last up to two weeks. In addition, the dental hygiene program at Wytheville Community College and the Dental Assistant program at the Washington County Skill Center will provide students who will work at the clinic.

The clinic will operate on a sliding-fee arrangement so that even people who cannot afford dental care will be able to receive services. Many residents will simply have to pay a small co-payment, and those who can afford greater payment will pay in accordance with their means.

In an innovative arrangement, District 3 Governmental Cooperative has agreed to work in partnership with Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems to provide transportation to individuals who cannot drive to the clinic. Many who are in the greatest need of dental services are senior citizens, individuals with disabilities or others who might not be able to travel from the six county region to the dental clinic. The transportation arrangement will ensure that individuals who might otherwise forego dental care will have access to these services. Later, Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems plans to purchase a van to provide greater patient transportation options for patients.

With the transportation arrangement, I am pleased to report that the new regional dental clinic expects to perform more than 5,000 dental procedures to provide care to more than 3,200 patients in the first year that it is in operation. The new clinic will truly go a long way in meeting the need for affordable dental care in Southwest Virginia, and I am pleased that residents of Smyth, Washington, Wythe, Carroll, Bland, Grayson Counties and the City of Galax will now have access to this outstanding resource for affordable dental care.

I would like to take the opportunity of these remarks to thank a number of individuals who have been instrumental in the success we celebrate today.

I want to commend Howard Chapman, Executive Director, and Jeff Campbell, Chairman of the Board of Directors, and the other Members of the Board of Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems. This organization recognized the need for dental services for low and moderate income families and has designed an outstanding program that will provide these services.

I also want to thank Sheena Henderson, Dental Coordinator for Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems.

I would also like to thank the Virginia Commonwealth University Dental School, the Dental Hygiene program at Wytheville Community College, the Washington County Skill Center, and the Smyth County Free Clinic for their partnership with the Regional Dental Clinic.

Finally, I would like to thank my Director of Community Development, Derek Lyall, for his persistent and persuasive efforts on behalf of the new clinic.

The new Regional Dental clinic is an excellent example of what can be accomplished when citizens and government officials on the local, state and federal levels work together in aid of a common purpose. The establishment of the clinic represents a significant and vital step in meeting the health care needs of the residents of Southwest Virginia, and I want to congratulate all here for that cooperation and successful work.