Harvest Foundation marks its 10th anniversary

Over the past 10 years, The Harvest Foundation has touched many aspects of life in Henry County and Martinsville. This year, as Harvest is marking its 10th anniversary, the Martinsville Bulletin is looking at the impact of the more than $74 million in grants it has made. This section includes an article on each of the three areas on which Harvest focuses — community vitality (Pages 2, 4), education (Pages 33-34) and health (Pages 44-45) — and an article on a key success story in each of those areas. Above, Albert Harris Elementary School students celebrate as Principal Tamra Vaughan releases young fish into the Smith River as part of a previous year’s Trout in the Classroom project, which benefits from Harvest money. At top left, Jerri Crews, R.N., with the Henry County Schools and the Martinsville Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness, checks Vicky Stone’s blood pressure during a diabetes management class sponsored by the coalition. Look for more coverage of Harvest throughout this year. (Contributed photos)
Vitality: Efforts focus on creating jobs here

By DEBBIE HALL
Bulletin Staff Writer

The Harvest Foundation’s funding for community vitality is designed to create a community that companies want to come to, according to Senior Program Officer Jeffrey Mansour.

“We are not going to be what we once were,” Mansour said, but owing to the combined efforts of the Harvest Foundation, other agencies and officials, “I think the future of Martinsville and Henry County is bright.”

From 2003 to 2011, Harvest awarded community vitality grants that totaled more than $34.6 million. More than $21 million of that was devoted to economic and community development projects, according to a Harvest chart. The chart also showed that $5.9 million was awarded to the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corp. (EDC).

The EDC receives $1 million a year, and without those funds the current model could not function, according to the agency’s board chairman.

The EDC also receives an annual combined allotment of $300,000 from Henry County and Martinsville and $5,000 from C-Peg (Chamber’s Partnership for Economic Growth), but without the Harvest Foundation’s $1 million “we would have to dramatically scale back our efforts, and some of the broader ranging efforts, such as tourism, would have to be significantly scaled back,” if not for Harvest funds, said John Parkinson, board chairman.

“It would be devastating blow to the EDC” if it did not have those funds, he added.

The Harvest Foundation was created in 2003 with proceeds from the sale of Memorial Hospital.

Its mission is to research and responsibly invest in programs and initiatives in three sectors: health, education and community vitality.

Economic development is the primary focus of the community vitality sector, but not all those funds go to the EDC. For instance, the foundation awarded more than $5.5 million for grading and other site work at the Commonwealth Crossing.

See VITALITY, Page 4

Rothrock: Spencer-Penn success is due to dedicated volunteers

By GINNY WRAY
Bulletin Staff Writer

The evolution of Spencer-Penn Elementary School into the Spencer-Penn Centre has been successful because of its dedicated volunteers and their “never-say-never” attitude, according to the president of the Harvest Foundation.

The Harvest Foundation’s $120,000 in grants to the center has helped, but change has occurred because people were dedicated to making it happen, according to Allyson Rothrock of Harvest.

“People help us do the work. The nonprofit partners do the difficult work to forge change. When you get a group of people who are willing to do the work, to get their hands dirty, it shows there are possibilities here,” she added.

That attitude is illustrated in a story dating back to 2005. At that time, members of the Spencer-Penn School Preservation Organization (SPSPO) asked Harvest for funds to restore their beloved school. Harvest asked a question commonly posed to nonprofits: “What will you do if you don’t receive Harvest funds?”

Mary Jordan, who was Spencer-Penn’s executive director at the time, responded: “We’ll just do it without you and sell a lot more hot dogs.”

Rothrock worked with Jordan and others at Spencer-Penn for more than two years. They began meeting in the former school when it had no heat and was dark and musty. But Jordan and others had a vision of creating a community center.

See SPENCER-PENN, Page 4
Vitality

(Continued from Page 2)

Business Centre (CCBC), according to previous reports and the chart. The CCBC is among a host of projects that “the Harvest Foundation has helped to move forward,” Parkinson said. Without its support, “we wouldn’t be starting to look at creating a Commonwealth Crossing this year. Without Harvest stepping up and giving that grant, Commonwealth Crossing would essentially have been dead!”

If “we can find the right business to go in there, it has a huge potential” to improve the area’s economic future, he added. Harvest also created the Southside Business Technology Center, Mansour said. That center partners with the EDC and other groups to help retain companies and also help existing businesses expand.

Mansour noted that although the Harvest Foundation does not actually create jobs, it focuses on helping produce an environment that is conducive to job creation by addressing quality-of-life issues. That is why the secondary focus of the community vitality sector is on projects that capitalize on the area’s natural setting, climate, cultural amenities and other factors, Mansour said.

“If you have a nice place to live, residents will like to live there, and you will have a strong community,” he said. Strong communities, in turn, attract companies that create jobs, he added.

For instance, Harvest paid $81.7 million to build the Smith River Sports Complex off the U.S. 58 Bypass and Irisburg Road. When construction was complete, oversight and management of the facility became the responsibility of the Southern Virginia Recreation Authority.

The sports complex opened in 2009 and has received more than $4.1 million for startup and operating costs, according to the foundation’s website and previous reports.

The sports complex’s impact on the local economy last year was more than $500,000, Operations Director Billy Russo estimated. In addition, a little more than $2 million in Harvest funds has gone to “family independence programs,” or organizations working with people in crisis situations to meet the basic needs of food, water, shelter, clothing and warmth, and/or organizations that help residents who are facing significant challenges in their daily lives.

The United Way and Grace Network are listed as key grantees in that area.

In the “program related investment” category, $364,000 was given to the Martinsville Redevelopment Housing Authority, the chart showed.

Harvest also invested more than $10.8 million in projects designed to improve the quality of life, with $301,000 to Piedmont Arts Association, $1.1 million to the Virginia Museum of Natural History, and more than $1 million to the Dan River Basin Association (DRBA).

Brian Williams, program manager of DRBA, said that although some Harvest funds are tapped to pay for staffing, a majority is earmarked for trails and other projects.

DRBA is instrumental in building and connecting trails, and it also promotes environmental education; spearheads projects to provide additional Smith River access points and works with Trout in the Classroom, heritage projects and others designed to help protect the river, he said.

Harvest funds are instrumental to those areas, and they also are used to leverage in-kind donations and grant money through partnerships with Dominion Power, Henry County and other organizations and agencies, Williams said.

“We are not only building greenways and blueways, but we also are providing educational opportunities and fulfilling the Harvest Foundation’s mission of providing for the health and wellness of the community,” Williams said.

The network of trails helps ensure that Martinsville and Henry County is not “some place to drive through” on the way to someplace else, “but a destination in and of itself,” Mansour said.

Soccer is played at the Smith River Sports Complex.

Spencer-Penn

(Continued from Page 2)

Each time Rothrock returned, she said, there were more volunteers painting, repairing the plumbing and doing other tasks, and Jordan was right there with them each time. She calls them her “jacklegs.” “Each time it was more amazing to me that all these people came around to a common vision of a meeting place for the community,” Rothrock said. “There was not a time when Mary Jordan was not working with them. It was amazing to watch Hayley and how somebody to lead them and work with them hand in hand. It was not necessarily our money that did that; it was the people.”

From Spencer-Penn’s perspective, Rothrock “advised us to divide our priorities in phases to figure out what we could achieve first. Thanks to our ‘jacklegs,’ major portions of the renovation work had already gotten off the ground. Harvest’s support then helped us build on all the work we’d already done and think about ways to do it even better,” Jordan said.

The “jacklegs” had been meeting twice each week since 2005 to paint and restore some of the historic design elements of the Spencer-Penn building. They renovated two major areas—the Alumni Hall (the former gym) and the Banquet Hall (the former library). They also registered the building on the National Historic Register; established the board of directors, wrote and adopted bylaws and obtained incorporation and 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. Through various fundraising efforts, the SPSPO repaid the $20,000 loan it received to buy the building.

Spencer-Penn received two Harvest grants. The first, in 2006 for $137,000, funded planning and improvements to facilities, according to Jeffrey W. Mansour, senior program officer-community vitality for Harvest. The second, in 2008 for $145,000, helped fund improvements that help the center generate revenue to be self-sustaining, such as the stage, Banquet Hall and Community Kitchen, as well as programs for seniors and outreach, he said.

“By improving the Banquet Hall and creating the caterers’ kitchenette, our rentals have increased, which will help move us toward self-sustainability,” said center board Vice President Nelda Purcell. “We’ve also been able to focus on expanding our Music Nights, which have been another extremely successful fundraising project.”

Spencer-Penn leveraged its $182,000 in Harvest grants into more than $1 million in other funds, Rothrock said. That included funds from the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission along with personal and corporate donations, she said.

“The more work they did, the more they demonstrated success, the more people were willing to invest in them,” Rothrock added.

The 2008 grant recently ended. While Mansour could not say whether Spencer-Penn will get more funds in the future, he said it is hard for anyone to say no to an organization that has worked hard to secure other sources of support.

Carrie Denny, who succeeded Jordan as executive director of Spencer-Penn, said the center plans to ask Harvest for additional aid and development grant to determine what new programs could be held at the center to benefit the community. She has no timetable for that request.

Programs that build skills among adults are the priority, she said. “We want to find out the needs for Henry and Patrick counties to assess what really, really needed. There are many duplicating services; we want something new and needed.”

Denny estimated it would have taken the center a decade to raise donations to total the $182,000 it received in the last Harvest grant. “It sped up the process to do what we’ve done,” she added.

Denny was named executive director of the center in October 2011 after Jordan retired. The center also recently named Tamara Johnson the new kitchen manager of the Community Kitchen. That facility is available to local entrepreneurs who want to start catering and other food-production businesses. Bonnie Freeman, the center’s administrative assistant, helps organize facility rentals and event planning.

Some events on the center’s calendar include a bluegrass and barbecue festival, Taste of the Foodhille culinary showcase, an outdoor sportsmen expo and Spencer-Penn’s Women’s Retreat on Wealth, Wellness and Wisdom.

Spencer-Penn is less a model for Harvest grants than a model of what this community has to do together to forge success here. Harvest advocates for change, but we cannot reshape the area by ourselves. It takes hearing systemic change in urban areas talk people being patient” and willing to work to make things happen, Rothrock said. “Harvest is always about long-term change.”
Education funds: From preschool to college degree

By PAUL COLLINS
Bulletin Staff Writer

The harvest foundation views education from cradle to career, as a powerful force that can improve lives of individuals and families as well as the area’s economy.

Harvest Education Program Officer Angela R. Logan refers to it as the education continuum. That is a continuous series of things that blend into one another seamlessly.

As an example, she said, “In order to reach a student and think about (a) career, you can’t wait until the senior year. You need to reach a child when he or she is young.” The key is to nurture and provide supports along the way, she said.

From 2009-11, Harvest awarded $32,482,511 in education-related grants. That is nearly one-third of the approximately $74.6 million which Harvest has awarded in 181 grants since it was established in 2002, according to Harvest President Alyson Rothrock.

They break down this way:
- $21,040,694 for academics: $1,011,277 in grants for early childhood education, including parent education; $8,754,737 in grants for kindergarten through 12th grade education; and
- $35,000 for career and technical education.
- $71,179 for leadership and capacity building.
- $1,645,679 for youth leadership/development.

In the area of early childhood, Harvest originally worked with the Success by 6 Initiative, which led to Smart Beginnings.

Smart Beginnings is a community coalition that gives parents and caregivers the resources and knowledge needed to make sure children from birth to age 5 are ready for success when they enter school. Smart Beginnings’ hub for information and referral is The Starting Place, a one-stop center for families, children and child care providers located at Liberty Fair Mall. (See related story)

In K-12 education, Harvest provided grants for the Henry County and Martinsville school systems and Carlsisle School. The foundation has invested heavily in professional development for teachers.

See EDUCATION, Page 34

Smart Beginnings is helping kids get ready for school, life

“Isaiah” (not his real name) came into the care of his aunt when he was 2 years old because his mother had drug problems.

Isaiah had virtually no language skills and had anger management problems because he had been left alone in his crib for long periods of time.

His aunt, who was in her 40s and had no children of her own, hardly knew where to turn. So she sought help through Smart Beginnings by visiting The Starting Place at Liberty Fair Mall, where the staff assisted her in finding services to help Isaiah.

Smart Beginnings is a community coalition that gives parents and caregivers the resources and knowledge needed to make sure children from birth to age 5 are ready for success when they enter school. The Starting Place is Smart Beginnings’ one-stop information and referral center for families, children and child care providers.

Isaiah was connected to a local family physician, speech specialist and other support services. His aunt received tips about the importance of spending a lot of time talking and reading to Isaiah and loving and nurturing him.

Now, his speech and social skills are much improved. At first, Isaiah would play alone when he came to The Starting Place, but after a number of visits there, he began to play with other children.

Isaiah is about 3 now. He is doing well and is on track for starting school, said Sheryl Agee, who told Isaiah’s story. Agee is director of Smart Beginnings.

Agee said Smart Beginnings is a coalition of groups working together to ensure that “all chil-
Education

(Continued from Page 33) which has the greatest impact on student achievement, Logan said. “We all can remember that one great teacher who changed our lives,” said Logan.

“Before the K-12 Initiative, it wasn’t unusual for an area school building to have an annual budget of $5,000 for professional development. Now our education partners receive a total of $700,000 annually for professional development. This investment allows our teachers and administrators to have access to cutting-edge, research-based strategies to impact student achievement,” she added.

One example of professional development is Harvest’s funding for teachers to secure National Board Certification.

Janet Lewis, an English teacher at Fieldale-Collinsville Middle School who has 16 years of experience, said in a Henry County Schools news release that the certification process helped her look at teaching in new ways.

“When you have been teaching as long as I have, it’s easy to become complacent,” Lewis said. “The board process forced me to examine my classroom through a new lens. As a result, I am able to bring more reflective practices to my students.”

Harvest also has invested in differentiated instruction, or tailoring instruction to meet individual student needs. For instance, Logan said, if a lesson is all lecture, “I won’t necessarily get it. I need to see it and do something” to understand the material.

Harvest has invested in aligning curriculum with the state Standards of Learning to make sure students are being taught what they are expected to know by the state.

According to its website, Harvest has invested in increasing students’ advanced scores on SOL tests, increasing enrollment in advanced Placement courses, increasing AP test scores, and a literacy and math initiative, among others. According to the Virginia Department of Education website, SOL tests are graded on a scale of 0-600 with 400 representing the minimum level of acceptable proficiency and 500 representing advanced proficiency.

Harvest gave grants to Piedmont Governor’s School for Mathematics, Science and Technology to help area high school students in the annual robotics competition and “to support students on the FIRST Robotics Team.”

In the area of post-secondary education, Harvest has matched state funding for New College Institute dollar for dollar, which amounts to a total Harvest investment of about $10 million from 2003-11, according to Rotherok. In all, Harvest pledged a $50 million challenge grant to match state funds to create a public four-year higher education institution here.

“NCI began in 2006-07 with 118 students enrolled in six degree programs. For the 2010-2011 academic year, there were 410 students enrolled in 15 degree programs. To date, 244 students have earned bachelor’s, master’s and education specialist degrees through NCI,” Logan stated.

She added that 39,018 square feet of space in uptown Martinsville has been renovated for and occupied by NCI.

One of the biggest economic engines of many localities is a college, said Logan, who has lived and worked in college towns. She believes NCI could help transform this area’s economy.

Harvest has invested in after-school and leadership development programs. One is MICH After 3, coordinated out of Patrick Henry Community College. Students learn about and apply skills toward the arts, athletics, technology, academics and personal character development.

Logan said by being involved in constructive activities, students are less likely to be involved in dangerous activities, such as drugs, alcohol and sex, from 3 to 6 p.m.

Harvest also has invested in Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, helping increase black and Hispanic representation.

Another leadership development program that has received Harvest funding is the Nonprofit Leaders Network, which aims to improve the effectiveness of local nonprofits. One aspect of that is a 30-hour-hour classroom certificate in nonprofit management through Duke University that nonprofit leaders can complete at a fraction of the cost if they took it on their own.

In career and technical education, Harvest has invested in the Dan River Regional Collaborative to prepare workers and job seekers for employment in the region in the areas of advanced manufacturing, energy, health care and information technology, according to Logan and a news release.

As an example, she said students who learned how to do home energy audits through the training program made window, furnace, gutter and downspout improvements to the home of a family that had an energy inefficient home and had gotten sick because of mold in the basement due to poor drainage.

Smart

(Continued from Page 35) weren’t connected in any way,” Agee said.

Agee estimated that from 2007-2011, Smart Beginnings’ budget totaled roughly $600,000, of which the Harvest Foundation funded about $175,000. That enabled Smart Beginnings to leverage $225,000 in funding from the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation. Harvest also has awarded Smart Beginnings a total of about $537,000 for 2012-14, Agee said.

Consider these points, made by Agee:

- There are 4,565 children under age 5 in Henry County and Martinsville. That includes 3,619 in the county and 1,076 in the city.
- 22.8 percent of married families with children under 5 in Henry County and 15.8 percent in Martinsville had incomes below the federal poverty level. Also, 61.6 percent of female-head families with children under 5 in Henry County and 55.8 percent in Martinsville had incomes below the federal poverty level.
- 46.1 percent of grandparents with grandchildren under 5 in Henry County were living with their grandchildren and financially responsible for them; it was 56.2 percent in Martinsville.
- The percentage of children whose PALS-5 (kindergarten readiness assessment) scores were below kindergarten readiness levels was 25 percent (one in four) in Henry County in 2007-08 and 15.8 percent in 2009-10, and 10.9 percent in Martinsville in 2007-08 and 9.9 percent in 2009-10.

Drew and Devin Corbin enjoy a healthy snack as they show off the Skippyjon Jones masks they made after reading “Skippyjon Jones Color Crazy” at a My Child and Me event at The Starting Place. Drew and Devin are the sons of Steven and Nicole Corbin.

- More than 85 percent of brain development occurs between birth and 5 years of age.
- Early childhood success in school leads to long-term improvement in high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, lower rates of incarceration and increased job success.
- Regular development screenings are important to children. Children exposed to six or seven risk factors such as poverty, caregiver mental illness, child maltreatment, single parent and low maternal education face 60-100 percent likelihood of having one or more delays in their cognitive, language and emotional development.
- Significant adversity in childhood has been linked to increased risk of adult health issues. In particular, diabetes, stroke, obesity and even some forms of cancer.
- “...High-quality early childhood programs bring impressive returns on investment to the public as much as $4 to $7 in returns for every dollar invested,” Agee added.

Smart Beginnings started with about 18 coalition partners and now has about 30 and continues to grow. Coalition partners are in areas such as early learning family support, health, mental health and nutrition, and special needs/interagency intervention.

The Starting Place opened in 2008 as a hub for information and referral. Parents and families come to ask questions and find resources. Parenting classes are offered. Parents and other caregivers can network. Fun and educational activities are available for children. Toddle bags with educational activities and tips are available for families. Development screenings are available. Super Kid Saturday, which offers family activities so children can learn and explore, is held once a month at various locations.

What has been Smart Beginnings’ impact? According to information from Agee:

- The Starting Place is serving 425 children and families, with parents and caregivers reporting a 65 percent increase in knowledge about where to go in the community to find information and help about raising their children.
- Smart Beginnings has helped organizations that provide early education implement a common curriculum, which, along with other collaboration among organizations, has resulted in 190 percent more parents being reached.
- 175 developmental screenings were conducted through The Starting Place, and 97 percent of the children screened were referred to partners for further assessment of potential delays. Thirty-one percent were found to have delays and connected to intervention services.

Two long-term studies found that developmental screenings coupled with support services led to significant savings for society — as much as $18,000 for each child receiving intervention. That’s an estimated $388,000 in long-term savings locally, according to Agee.

- Smart Beginnings served as outreach coordinator for national Text4Baby, providing free text messages to mothers through their pregnancy and the baby’s first year. Local participation rose by 150 percent.
- Smart Beginnings is working to implement a statewide system for child care facilities in Henry County and Martinsville. That’s a system for consumers that rates the quality of child care facilities by assigning
Health: Prevention, treatment targeted

By MICKEY POWELL
Bulletin Staff Writer

Henry County and Martinsville residents overall are not as healthy as those in many localities statewide, and the Harvest Foundation is trying to change that.

During the past decade, the foundation awarded 36 grants totaling more than $16.4 million to 20 organizations working to improve area residents’ health and safety, said Director of Programs Nancy Cox.

Studies done in 2003 and 2010 revealed the area has higher death rates than state averages due to serious health problems such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Obesity, strokes, teen pregnancy and infant mortality are also problems. Hospitalizations are common for conditions such as pneumonia, congestive heart failure and diabetes that Cox said “can often be prevented with proper outpatient care.”

There are many hospitalizations for alcohol and drug abuse, and there is a shortage of primary care doctors locally, the studies show.

Before the studies were done, “we knew it was bad, but we didn’t know it was this bad,” Cox admitted.

The Community Health Assessment conducted in 2010 revealed the area’s population is significantly older, less educated and more stressed because of the area’s economic troubles than Virginia’s overall population. Such factors can affect people’s health.

Cox said residents who are struggling financially “tend to wait until the last minute” to seek medical care when needed, which can worsen ailments.

Also, she recalled being surprised to find out that many people go to a hospital emergency room when they have severe dental problems. It can be hard to convince people to take better care of themselves.

“Probably the toughest thing is getting people, when they’re younger and feeling good, to change things” in a way that will benefit them in the future, such as eating healthier foods and quitting smoking, said Barbara Jackman, executive director of the Martinsville Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness.

Taking such actions will have “a real impact ... 10 to 20 years down the road,” Jackman said.

Of the $16,432,824 in health-related grants that Harvest awarded from 2003 to 2011, $11,908,719 — almost 71 percent was given to organizations trying to improve access to medical and dental care for patients in dire financial straits, coalition information shows.

Those organizations include the Coalition for Health and Wellness, Free Medical Clinic of Martinsville and Henry County, Piedmont Virginia Dental Health Foundation and Piedmont Access to Health Services.

See HEALTH, Page 45

Coalition is unique in its scope of services

The Martinsville Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness is different from any other community-based health improvement initiative nationwide, officials with the coalition and The Harvest Foundation have determined.

“They’ve never seen another program ... with the depth and breadth of services” under one umbrella aimed at both keeping people healthy and improving their access to health care when they get sick, said Nancy Cox, Harvest’s director of programs. She also has been the foundation’s health program officer.

That uniqueness is a major factor that influenced her decision in 2008 to quit working for the Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C., and join Harvest, she said.

The coalition was launched in 2005 with a five-year, $1.5 million Harvest grant. It reaches out to area residents with barriers to quality health care, such as a lack of insurance or ability to pay. Yet most of its programs and services are available to anyone, regardless of their economic status.

Executive Director Barbara Jackman said that also sets the coalition apart. Most health improvement efforts nationwide seem to be targeted to certain segments of the population, she said.

The coalition altogether has received about $5.5 million from Harvest for various activities, Jackman said. It also gets funds from sources such as federal and state grants, other organizations and donations, she said.

Basically, the coalition’s goal is “to build a network in the community that helps residents find and receive affordable medical care and other services, she emphasized.

One of the coalition’s major components is the Bassett Family Practice on T.B. Stanley Highway, which provides basic medical care such as treatments for minor illnesses, chronic disease management services and vaccinations.

“It is the hub of improving access to health care” locally, Jackman said.

The clinic has two part-time physicians and two full-time nurse practitioners. It is in the process of recruiting a third doctor who will work full time.

Anyone can visit the clinic. Fees for services are determined according to a sliding scale based on a patient’s income and family size. Medicare, Medicaid and most private insurance are accepted. The clinic receives federal funds so it can provide care at little cost to patients who need it.

Jackman said the clinic has almost 3,300 patients. About two-thirds of them have some type of financial hardship, such as no insurance or insurance with high deductibles, she said.

The clinic helps people who cannot afford to visit a regular doctor’s office to have an ongoing relationship with primary care providers. Jackman said that is important because the more familiar doctors and nurse practitioners are with a patient’s health condition, the better able they are to give appropriate treatments, especially for prolonged problems.

The coalition also operates the Free Medical Clinic of Martinsville and Henry County on Hospital Drive. However, Jackman admitted that the clinic’s future is uncertain, mainly because it is hard to find volunteers — including doctors — to staff it regularly.

In 2011, the clinic treated about 400 patients. Jackman said about half of them now are being cared for by either Bassett Family Practice or Piedmont Access to Health Services (PATHS), a Danville-based organization that has a clinic on Commons Boulevard in Martinsville.

The Free Clinic helps patients who cannot afford to visit the Bassett, PATHS or another medical clinic so they can have a regular pri-
Coalition

(Continued from Page 44)

many care doctor, said Jackman. She noted, though, there is a shortage of primary care doctors in Henry County and Martinsville, which can hinder the transition.

When he lost his job at a textile plant in Eden, N.C., James Gravelly lost his health insurance. He went to the Free Clinic several times for treatment of back pain and sinus problems on the advice of his regular physician.

The clinic “helped me out until I got back on my feet,” said Gravelly, who lives in the Martinsville area.

“I’d be disappointed” if it closed, he said.

“Just a lot of people... with no job, no insurance. It’s a great asset I think a lot of people aren’t aware of.”

Another major component of the coalition is MedAssist, which helps people with low to moderate incomes who lack prescription drug insurance obtain crucial medications at little or no cost.

MedAssist serves more than 2,000 people each year. Jackman said. To qualify, people must meet income limits and, usually, not have any type of insurance that covers medicine, she said.

To help people stay fit and healthy, the coalition offers aerobics and health education classes at various locations. Health education classes are on topics such as maintaining healthy lifestyles and self-managing diabetes and other chronic health problems.

All classes are free and open to the public, Jackman said.

Classes are “quite well attended,” she said, mentioning that the coalition is seeing more and more people signing up for them on the advice of doctors.

“We’ve seen dramatic improvements” in people with health problems who have taken the classes, said Jackman.

Participants report they feel better, are exercising more and following better diets, and they feel more comfortable discussing their health concerns with their doctors, she added.

The classes have helped both Gravelly and Wanda Crist get their diabetes under control.

After people learn they have diabetes, “they don’t know what to expect.” Crist said.

Gravelly said the same thing.

They said the classes have given them valuable information on topics such as which foods they should eat, how much they should eat of the foods that are good for them and how to read labels on food items to find out which ones are healthy.

“I’ve learned a lot,” Crist said.

“All around, it’s just great information” being presented in the classes, Gravelly added.

Health Connect being created

Jackman and Cox noted that the coalition plans to launch “Health Connect,” a hub to find out about health care services available in Henry County and Martinsville.

The service will have in-person, telephone and online components. People will be able to use Health Connect to, for instance, learn which doctors are accepting new patients and/or not accepting patients enrolled in federal health insurance programs, according to Jackman and Cox.

People also will be able to get information about government aid programs and help in enrolling in the programs, as well as help in learning to use health care equipment such as blood pressure devices, they said.

Some of those services already are being provided in the community, but with Health Connect they “will be centralized better,” Jackman said.