

Honoring health care's 'hidden heroes'

By Shawn Myrick, Sun Staff

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LOWELL -- Deb Chausse said she loves helping homeless families as a job. She enjoys the fact she can give people shelter, food and health care. "(My work) gives me enormous satisfaction," said Chausse, executive director for House of Hope. "I get paid for making a difference."

The Lowell Community Health Center believes any one who aids health care should feel satisfaction and wants to give them some recognition. To celebrate National Health Center Week next week, the center is hosting an award-ceremony luncheon on Tuesday and a public cookout on Thursday.

"The work that community health centers are doing often is under the radar," said Maura Smith, director of development and external relations. "Health-care centers are health-care heroes."

The Community Leaders Luncheon starts at noon in the Lowell Senior Center. During the luncheon, the center will hand out several 'Health Care Hero' awards to recipients who the center feels have helped make a difference.

"They are helping us to do our job better, but they are not getting recognized," said Smith. "So we select 'hidden heroes.'"

Chausse, one of the award recipients, is excited about being recognized by her colleagues.

"To be recognized by your community it is like being recognized by your family," said Chausse. "Hey 'sis' you're doing a good job."

The luncheon features a speech by Dr. JudyAnn Bigby, state secretary of health and human services. Mayor Edward "Bud" Caulfield and City Manager Bernie Lynch also will attend.

Beginning at noon, the Community Cookout continues to 2 p.m., in the lot behind LCHC and focuses on educating the general public. The public cookout will have educational material, food, art activities for children, fitness activities, bubble stations, exotic animals, and agencies that encourages community activities.

"It is great opportunity for different service organizations to collaborate," said LCHS Communications Manager George Nugent. "We do have different activities for children."

The cookout is part of the LCHC's goal to help all individuals via health care.

"Ninety-one percent of our patients qualify as low income, and 20 percent are uninsured," said Smith. "Health care is a basic human right, and our mission is to provide high-quality health care regardless of the ability to pay."

Besides Chausse, award recipients are Steve Geoffroy of Long Term Solutions Pharmacy; the Rev. Karimi Mumbui of Kenya Community Ushindi Church; Janet Barsorian of Lowell Transitional Living Center; Sarah Imershein of Neighborhood Health Plan; Sara Khun and Rena Theum of the Lowell Police Department; Irene Egan of the Visiting Nurses Association of Greater Lowell; and Christopher Scott, city editor at The Sun.