

Community Health Center Breaks Ground in Tarpon Springs

Gus has been working for quite a while to obtain a location and support construction for a new Community Health Center facility in Tarpon Springs.

On May 29th, he saw the result of years of hard work and persistence when he gathered with local officials to break ground on the new facility, which will be adjacent to St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Tarpon Springs.

Community Health Centers of Pinellas, the 23-year-old health care provider, which operates five locations throughout the county, will begin construction on an 8,000-square-foot state-of-the-art health clinic.

Once it opens in Spring 2009, the health care facility will have a family care doctor and an advanced registered nurse practitioner. It will also have a pediatrician or nurse practitioner who specializes in pediatrics. Doctors will focus on keeping patients immunized, and there will be nutritionists on hand to promote a healthy lifestyle. Patients at the new facility will also be eligible to receive medications at a reduced cost from an in-house pharmacy.

As a State Representative, Gus worked with local officials to find a suitable location for the new facility in Tarpon Springs. Additionally, through legislation he passed while in the Florida State House, Gus created a process for federal funding to work through to the State more effectively by allowing for Community Health Centers to apply directly to a panel for the allocation of funding.

For his work on this and other issues supporting community-based health care centers, Gus was subsequently named "Legislator of the Year" by Community Health Centers of Florida.

More on this from the St. Pete Times...

Construction and equipment for the new facility will be funded by a \$1.2-million federal appropriation awarded in 2004 that was co-sponsored by U.S. Rep. C.W. Bill Young, R-Indian Shores, and former U.S. Rep. Mike Bilirakis, R-Tarpon Springs.

"It's finally here. It's hard to believe," said Bilirakis, who attended the ground breaking with his wife, Evelyn.

Bilirakis' son, U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Palm Harbor, helped the project during his tenure as a state legislator by creating a panel to oversee the allocation of Medicaid funds to community health center facilities.

"We made this a family project and finally it came through," Gus Bilirakis said.

Centers such as the one planned in Tarpon Springs can defray emergency room and long-term care costs and provide important health and wellness services to those without health insurance, Gus Bilirakis said.

"It's so crucial we have this center," he said.

America's community health centers provide primary and preventative health care services to more than 17 million Americans, many of whom are uninsured or underinsured.

Below is an excerpt from prepared remarks Gus gave during the ground breaking ceremony...

..."Faced with the skyrocketing costs of health care and the scarcity of health insurance for millions of Americans, strengthening community health centers is one of the most cost effective ways to help address inadequacies in our country's health care system.

"Since 2001, Congress has steadily increased financial support for the health centers program, which funds centers like the one here in Tarpon Springs.

"These funding increases have allowed health centers to provide effective and affordable primary care services to an additional five million Americans in 900 communities across the country.

"I recently signed a letter to the committee in Congress that provides funding for health centers asking its leaders to increase health center funding by almost \$250 million this upcoming year to allow further expansions in the future.

"This additional funding will allow community health centers to continue reducing health care disparities, managing chronic illnesses, improving birth outcomes, and improving the health and well being of those they serve, including the more than 17 million they help who lack health insurance and can't afford to pay for their care.

"This is a reasonable investment since community health centers keep overall health costs down and ensure that those they serve are healthier and less likely to need more intensive and costly care for which we all would end up eventually paying."

Read more about Gus's work in Congress on Health Care issues [here](#).