FCH celebrates 10 years of service

By WHITNEY JOSEPH
whitney@millertonnews.com

HARLEM VALLEY — It's been one decade since the Foundation for Community Health (FCH) was created, and in that time the public charity has served as a valuable community resource to residents in New York's northeastern Dutchess and southeastern Columbia counties as well as Connecticut's northwestern Litchfield County. On Monday, April 8, the Dutchess County Legislature bestowed a special commendation on the foundation for its past accomplishments, as well as the good work it promises to continue in the future.

"I've been familiar with their efforts in northeastern Dutchess as long as I've been elected, and I'm always impressed with their level of commitment to the area," said Dutchess County Legislator Michael Kelsey (8-District). "The services they provide are meeting needs previously unmet, and are all great things for an under-served area. So when I knew their anniversary was up this year, and 50 years in a long time, I felt they were deserving of recognition both in their area and the whole county."

"A lot of my colleagues are from the western part of the county and don't have familiarity with the northeastern part of the county, let alone a group based in Sharon, Conn.," he added.

Darien's Katie Palmer House has been a board member of FCH since 2006, has served as its secretary and is currently the board's chairperson. "Serving first-hand the good work being done, and the county's recognition of that good work, was awesome," she said. "The work is always so meaningful, and to have a respected organization realize that, it just really empowers you to want to reach for better and more."

The Foundation for Community Health is located in Sharon, Conn. It's mission is prevention, access, collaboration. It does that and more by awarding grants, conducting research, providing technical and program development assistance, promoting collaborations and supporting advocacy for the benefit of the community, according to the commendation.

"The Foundation for Community Health is dedicated to improving the physical and mental health of the residents of its community with a primary focus on access to services, oral health and mental health, and transportation," the award continued.

FCH Director of Communications and Special Programs Gertrude O'Sullivan said the award reflects the agency's dedication to its mission.

"This work has been particularly gratifying for me now that we are beginning to see and hear information that indicates that we have been able to make meaningful differences in the day-to-day lives of the people living in our community," she said. "I am honored that we received the commendation from the Dutchess County Legislature and feel that our accomplishments are a reflection of our teamwork with our grantees and colleagues and I look forward to continuing this work."

Examples of one of FCH’s work includes the creation of a dental clinic at Hudson River Healthcare and an in-school dental program at Dover Elementary School — expected to reduce cavities in third-graders by more than 50 percent in less than five years. That’s based on the success of a pilot program in neighboring Connecticut. The Foundation has also helped fund more than 20,000 dental procedures in children including fillings, extractions, sealants and fluoride treatments.

In terms of mental health, FCH has provided support to thousands of children, with more than 10,000 participating in various prevention programs to help deal with issues like bullying, substance use and abuse and violence.

The Foundation also has helped residents through the Prescription Assistance Fund, with more than $1 million of support.

Then, there's the Foundation's commitment to finding transportation solutions in the region. It helped establish Northeast Dutchess Transit, a Dial-A-Ride service for eastern Dutchess County that provided nearly 2,500 rides for more than 400 riders in its first year of operation,

See COMMUNITY HEALTH, A10

According to FCH.

"It's been tremendous," said FCH Executive Director Nancy Heath. "Specifically in the area of transportation, that's the real story. Now there is a Dial-A-Ride that is actually picking up people and taking them places where they want to go when all other past attempts seemed impossible."

In fact, before the foundation stepped in northeastern Dutchess County was down to practically no bus service at all, as the county had made massive cuts to its daily LOOP bus service that severely affected the Harlem Valley. "Our goal is to make sure more services are evenly distributed throughout the county and in eastern Dutchess County."

"What's a unique specialty of the foundation," added Palmer House, "is that we're not only a grant maker and a research facilitator, because we actually help commission studies in areas where we don't see research done, but we're a capacity builder, so in those terms the foundation works shoulder-to-shoulder with grantees to help make solutions that touch more impactful."

Kelsey agreed. "I think what's important is that the foundation seeks to empower groups that are already existing, it works with the schools, Hudson River Healthcare, the North East Community Center — I feel that they are empowering groups already here as well as [working on] new initiatives."

Heath said that the goal, and knowing the county is now taking notice is a big incentive to keep moving forward.

"Thank the county took notice and sees we're here for the long haul," she said. "We're not just responsive on the short term but here for the long term, and we're willing to work with their departments closely to make sure rural considerations are respected... to make sure rural communities are represented."

The Foundation has also helped funded more than 20,000 dental procedures in children including fillings, extractions, sealants and fluoride treatments.

In terms of mental health, FCH has provided support to thousands of children, with more than 10,000 participating in various prevention programs to help deal with issues like bullying, substance use and abuse and violence.

The Foundation also has helped residents through the Prescription Assistance Fund, with more than $1 million of support.

Then, there's the Foundation's commitment to finding transportation solutions in the region. It helped establish Northeast Dutchess Transit, a Dial-A-Ride service for eastern Dutchess County that provided nearly 2,500 rides for more than 400 riders in its first year of operation,