

Merced Health Center Opens New Addition

By PATRICK O'LEARY

As mariachi bands filled the air with enchanting notes, Dr. Sheridan Weinstein, regional health director of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, cut the ribbon officially opening the addition to the Merced Family Health Center Saturday afternoon.

An array of governmental representatives stood by as Jovita Alvarez of Livingston, president of the board of directors of the center, gave the official welcome.

"It is with tremendous pleasure that I am able to stand here today as we officially open this great facility in health care to residents of Merced County," said Alvarez.

Others who spoke were George Parker, mayor pro-tem of the City of Merced; Eduardo Espinosa, chairman of the California Rural Health Federation; Ann Klinger, Merced County Supervisor; Assemblyman John Thurman, and State Senator George Zenovich.

Assemblyman Thurman praised those responsible for the fine job in putting together the center. "With the addition of these facilities and the staff of young doctors and dentists, Merced County will be able to bring adequate health care to many in the county who otherwise would not receive it," he said.

Established in 1972 as a hospital-based medical clinic providing only night services, the center, an independent, community directed, non-profit organization, now provides comprehensive medical and dental care five days and two evenings a week.

Staffed by 35, including a dentist, physicians, nurse practitioner, nurses, lab technicians and a nutritionist, plus clerical and administrative personnel, the principle goal of the center is to provide quality health care at reasonable cost to those groups of people, who in the past have not had access to it.

According to Michael Sullivan, center director, "emphasis is placed on primary care given in a spirit of service and with respect for the dignity of each individual."

Sullivan indicated that farmworkers and their families, migrants and people of lower income, as well as all other residents of Merced County, are welcome at the center.

He said some 6,000 families utilize the services with approximately 400 patients being served weekly. "Some have health insurance; others have Medi-Cal and Medicare benefits and many others pay a fee-for-service on a sliding scale," he said.

Sullivan said maternal and child care, including family planning and nutrition education, are important aspects of the center.

The expansion is an outgrowth of efforts, starting in 1973, by the Merced County Health Department, the Livingston Community Health Clinic and the center, itself, of increased collaboration and coordination of activities with a view toward expanding and integrating services throughout Merced County.

Serving on the board of directors are Manuel Gallardo, Pedro Jimenez, Flora R. Martinez of Planada; Hilario Aguilar, Jovita Alvarez and Rodrigo Garcia of Livingston, Steve Lawson, Jose Lozano, Jesse Martinez of Merced and Alicia L. Dichochea, Socorra Figueroa and Virginia Escobar of Los Banos. Also serving on the board are Dr. Raymond Bessemer of the Merced-Mariposa Medical Society; Dr. Mark Conley of the Yosemite Dental Society; Linda Perry, R.N. of the Merced County Health Department and Frances Kirihara, Livingston Community Health Services.



HONORED GUESTS — The lobby of the new addition to the Merced Family Health Center is decorated in bright pastel colors with a futuristic design. Shown after the dedication are, left to right: Ann Klinger, Merced County Supervisor; Eduardo Espinosa, Chairman of the California Rural Health Federation; Jovita Alvarez, board chairman, and Dr. Sheridan Weinstein of HEW.

—Journal Photo