

A health center to call their very own

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It doesn't seem possible in this day of catastrophic medical prices, but a neighborhood group on the west side of Santa Cruz has signed a lease for its own medical center.

Following four years of work, the Westside Neighbors Association signed the lease this morning for space in the former Santa Cruz Medical Center building at 1700 Mission St.

It was the announced abandonment of the former clinic in 1978 by its 25 doctors who later moved to finer offices along Soquel Drive that coalesced the westside neighbors into a strong political base for a new wave of city politicians.

"I got active in elective politics over this issue," recalled socialist Mayor Michael Rotkin at the lease signing.

Active with him in the March, 1979, election was fellow socialist Bruce Van Allen who also won. Two years later, the neighbors groups were the winning

vote for progressives Mardi Wormhoudt and John Laird.

Those four, beholden to the neighborhood groups for their support, are now the majority vote of the city.

Ironically, two-term Councilmember John Mahaney was one of the 25 doctors who moved out of the westside clinic and he has lived to see his majority position on the council erode away as the neighborhood politics gathered strength.

Wormhoudt commented, "It's been a long, hard struggle, but if hard work, energy and enthusiasm have anything to do with this, it should be a success."

Directing the long struggle to gain a clinic for the medically-underprivileged westside has been the non-profit board of directors of the Santa Cruz Westside Community Health Center.

It emerged out of a neighborhood health watch program back in 1978 and firmed into an association in 1979 as residents struggled to keep health care in their community.

They pointed out that the many low-income

people on the west side now had to travel across town to see a doctor, a trip that was an expense and difficult for seniors, mothers with children and the handicapped.

Helping in the organizational tasks was a \$4,000 grant in revenue sharing money, and then the group was successful in getting the city to have a health need study conducted. It was funded with \$10,000 in federal money and proved what the neighbors all ready knew.

The health study found that the greatest health need was the lack of services and that the Westside, Beach Flats and Downtown neighborhoods mostly needed health care that low income persons could afford.

It noted there was only one doctor, a women's health clinic and a pediatrician's office on the west side.

The community health center will hire one doctor and a practioner nurse and its fees will be on a sliding scale.

Rotkin said it's headed in a direction where

people will pre-pay for medical services, much as prepayments made to insurance programs. "It's an idea I hope will grow in Santa Cruz," Rotkin said.

He cautioned the group's representatives today that city subsidies, now totalling \$80,000, will cease and the center will have to get on a paying basis through its fees, other government money and public support.

The association has 500 members out of the neighborhood and that might lead to Rotkin's hope that "middle class income people will help subsidy the lower income people."

Beatrice Meyers, chairwoman of the community board, said, "I am adamant in my views of people being treated personally and professionally (and) I feel we have an added responsibility in view of the new Medi-Cal cuts."

The center's services are to include help of volunteers, including that of professional medical people. To donate time or money call 458-9939 or 429-6434.