Universities team up to establish Health Center

Posted by revh on June 20, 2011 at 6:00 pm
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Officials from Florida A&M University, alongside Florida State University’s College of Medicine, are working with the Gadsden County School Board and the Gadsden County Health Department to develop a 4,000 square feet state-of-the-art Health and Wellness Service and Training Center at Havana Middle School.

To provide quality health care for students, Havana School Board employees and the citizens of Havana are at the forefront of Shirley Aaron’s, chair of the steering committee, agenda. Aaron is working tediously to congregate FAMU, FSU, Tallahassee Community College, Gadsden County officials and the community to decrease the number of individuals affected by inadequate healthcare in Havana. A large population of the community is living without insurance or receives Medicaid.

“It has been my dream for a long time to have a health and wellness center that serves the people who are
underserved, or served in a limited way in Havana,” said Aaron.

According to Aaron, there is one practicing medical provider in Havana, which does not provide medical services for individuals receiving Medicaid.

“We decided to create a center where we have students from pharmacy, allied health, dental hygiene, nursing, physical therapy and medicine working together,” said Dr. Maggie Blackburn, a committee member and director of rural health in FSU’s Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health.

In December 2010, Yvonne Nelson-Langley, program coordinator for FAMU Community Health Alliance, was brought on board bridging the gap between the committee and the university.

“FAMU President [James H. Ammons] and Provost [Cynthia Hughes Harris] really thought it was important that FAMU be involved in health initiatives that are going on in the community so that we can provide support and technical assistance,” said Langley. “Also, we want to know what is happening as we provide different types of training for students as well as activities and community service.”

Langley provided an additional fraction that was necessary for the committee to move forward with restructuring the vacant space into a sustainable state-of-the-art facility by bringing officials from the FAMU School of Architecture to the table.

Gretchen Miller, visiting assistant professor in the FAMU School of Architecture, along with a group of students and professors, met with the steering committee to brainstorm ideas that will maximize the use of space by creating a sustainable facility. The group created three charrettes – architecture models – for the committee.

“We basically made them [the steering committee] better clients by educating them,” said Miller. “A group of students, teachers and advisors took the existing shell of the industrial center with some of the existing walls and created three floor plan scenarios for them to evaluate.”

In addition, the committee received a grant from the Department of Health’s Office of Minority Health to conduct focus groups in Havana to get input from the community on what their needs are. Langley plans to have three graduate students from FAMU’s School of Allied Health, the Department of Social Work and the Institute of Public Health to participate in conducting these focus groups.

“I’m making sure that FAMU’s interest is involved and that there is a voice advocating for our students; I am that voice,” said Langley. “I’m not only excited, but I feel it is imperative that we are involved.”

The program is currently awaiting feedback on two grants that will provide funding for the projects. The New Access Point grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration includes funding for the project as well as supplemental funds to finance renovations. The committee anticipates the facility will open August 2011; initially providing services for Havana County students and employees before branching out to the local community.

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