

No one should pretend Jackson County is a model of healthy living. It ranks far too poorly on too many indicators of public health, from obesity to smoking and on down the line.

Yet it bears noting that the situation could be worse without the Center for Family Health.

Kim Hinkle, who works at the community health center, received a statewide honor recently for her work there since it opened in early 1991. Yet the center itself deserves praise for filling a significant role in keeping this community healthy.

Consider:

- The center likely will provide medical services to 27,000 people this year, or about one in six Jackson County residents.

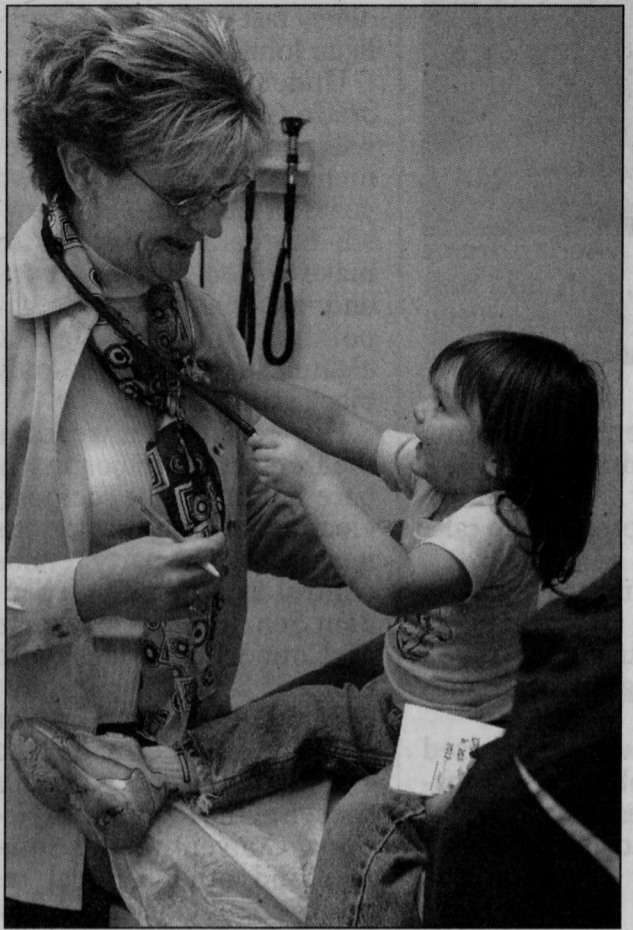
- It employs 180 people, mostly through five medical clinics.

- Two clinics are based at Jackson schools, while another could be on the way at Jackson High School if a state grant comes through next spring.

The center started with a mission of providing care to pregnant women but has expanded to provide care for people who are diabetic, who need psychological treatment and who need dental care.

Most of Jackson County's Medicaid recipients turn to the center for medical care, says Director Molly Kaser. But the clinics treat anyone with insurance. Billings to patients' insurance and to Medicaid account for about three-quarters of the nonprofit's \$14 million budget.

Despite this help, the center cannot handle everyone who needs medical care. Officials with Allegiance Health said last week that they had to absorb an extra \$3 million



CITIZEN PATRIOT FILE

Deborah Wesener, pediatric nurse practitioner, greets Megen Parker, at the Center for Family Health.

last year from people who did not pay for their health care. Many of those patients turned to the emergency room because they lacked primary care physicians.

Still, the challenge for the center is in finding ways to take on new patients. Notably, the dental clinic on High Street is not able to accept most new adult patients.

Going forward, the center must continue to answer that challenge. And options are available. The organization's leaders have considered moving their main clinic from Springport Road to a location within Jackson, where half of the center's patients live.

There is no clear road ahead for the Center for Family Health, nor for local and national health-care systems that most agree are straining to handle their basic needs. Still, there is a value in acknowledging the vital role this center plays. We encourage its continued success for the good of all of us.

— Jackson Citizen Patriot