

**“Our aim is to provide high-quality care close to home.”**



Lobby and waiting area.  
Opposite: Check-in station.



BY NANCY FONTAINE PHOTOS BY CPERRY PHOTOGRAPHY

# Mascoma Community HEALTH CENTER

Affordable, effective care at the grassroots level

What do you do when your only options for health and dental care are 30 or 40 minutes away by car? For some enterprising people in the Mascoma towns of Canaan, Dorchester, Enfield, Grafton, and Orange, the answer was to open a local, nonprofit, independent clinic.

The Mascoma Community Health Center (MCHC) is a state of the art medical building at the corner of Route 4 and Roberts Road in Canaan. Opened in 2017, the 13,000-square-foot building is suffused with natural light and houses both medical and dental clinics and a lab, plus space for future behavioral health, physical therapy, pharmacy, and radiography services. In addition, the clinic hosts after-hours wellness activities, parenting programs, and an opioid addiction treatment program.

**“Research has shown that primary health care can be delivered cheaper and more effectively at the community level,” says acting director Scott Berry (another volunteer).**





**Clockwise from far left:** Scott Berry, acting director. Kimberly Cotto, RN, and Karl Stanford, nurse practitioner, at the provider work station. Jeanne-Marie Bolduc, dental hygienist. Jean Patten, coordinator for Medicare, Medicaid, and sliding fee scale enrollment.

### **High-Quality Care Close to Home**

The idea for the health center emerged from several health care forums sponsored by the town of Canaan in 2013. Residents of the Mascoma towns were invited to discuss their concerns, needs, and options. Not willing to wait on federal or state governments or the existing health care industry to address their issues, volunteers formed a board, secured a USDA loan to build the clinic, and then raised local funds to supplement operations (\$1.56 million to date). The 16-member volunteer board comprises residents of the communities, and most are patients.

Investments in rural health clinics can really pay off. “Research has shown that primary health care can be delivered cheaper and more effectively at the community level,” says acting director Scott Berry (another volunteer). “Our aim is to provide high-quality care close to home.”

“Accessibility is a big issue for our community,” says board member Karen Wolk. “You’ve got to make the long drive, and then there are the psychological barriers of dealing with a large hospital system. It’s a disincentive. With a local clinic, patients get care before problems become critical. I’ve seen patients who had been embarrassed by the state of their teeth go on to get better jobs after being treated by our dental team. It improves their self-esteem as well as their physical health,” she says.

**“We take care of everyone. Our patients are a mix of those with insurance and those without. We happily take Medicare and Medicaid patients and are seeing many patients from the wider Upper Valley region.”**



**Clockwise from above:**  
Children's corner  
in the waiting room.  
Pediatric exam room.  
Laboratory.



**“We are looking for philanthropic support from those who value affordable health care for all.”**

### A Solid Start and Future Outlook

“Our sliding-fee scale for residents in the Mascoma towns makes care affordable. Hospitals do that too, but it’s complicated and can be intimidating to patients,” says Scott. “And 85 percent of our staff live in these towns. Community providers are approachable,” he adds.

MCHC has been growing steadily, at about 100 new patients a month, and reached 3,000 patients in August 2019. Scott states, “We take care of everyone. Our patients are a mix of those with insurance and those without. We happily take Medicare and Medicaid patients and are seeing many patients from the wider Upper Valley region.”

Among MCHC’s major goals are becoming self-sustaining and being designated a Federally Qualified Health Center, which will bring substantial federal financial assistance. “To get there, we need to continue to subsidize our operating budget with donations for the next six to eight months,” says Tim Jennings, chair of the development committee. “We are looking for philanthropic support from those who value affordable health care for all.”

Mascoma Community Health Center has made a solid start. With a little help from the wider Upper Valley community, the health center can continue to deliver extraordinary services for years to come. ❖

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