

LOCALNEWS

A decade of family planning

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

The Koochiching Family Planning center turns 10 years old this year, and to celebrate, they're getting the word out about the services they offer.

The center, at 205 Third Street, is a non-profit organization funded mostly through grants from the Minnesota Department of Health and the Otto Bremer Foundation, nurse Doreen Swenson said. While they have an informal relationship with Koochiching County, they aren't formal partners, she said.

"We use each other as a resource, so we make referrals to them, and they make referrals to us for our maternal child health program," Koochiching County Health Director Susan Congrave said.

When Planned Parenthood closed in 2002, a Reproductive Health Task Force was formed in December to work to replace the lost services, Swenson said. The group was made up of medical professionals from area clinics and organizations and worked to find a long-term replacement for Planned Parenthood. The Koochiching Family Planning center was the result.

"We had quite a large task force with a mission to provide some type of family planning that's accessible to everyone," Congrave said.

At first, the Koochich-



Doreen Swenson

ing County Health Department worked as the fiscal agent for the center by helping them find funding through grants. As the center became more independent, Women's Health Center in Duluth said they would be interested in providing the services, Congrave said.

"We contracted with them and paid them to offer services in the International Falls and Koochiching County area," she said.

The center occupies the same office space on Third Street where Planned Parenthood used to be, but Swenson made it clear the center is different.

"We are not Planned Parenthood, we are Koochiching Family Planning," she said.

Responsible family planning can have multiple positive effects on a community, Swenson said, noting that unplanned pregnancies put a strain on parents and community members.

"Early parenting, early pregnancy, single parenting, is linked to poverty, unfortunately," Swenson said. "Avoiding that helps communities."

According to a 2008 Guttmacher Institute study, public costs for births resulting from unplanned pregnancies nationwide

totaled \$12.5 billion.

Teaching people about responsible family planning cuts down on unplanned pregnancies that can create a large cost on the parents, Congrave said.

"You want people to wait until they have a job and benefits so they can take care of the child," Congrave said. "In turn, that lends itself to the tax base and give back to the community."

One of the misconceptions people have about family planning is talking about responsible sexual behavior makes them more promiscuous, which couldn't be more opposite, Swenson said. According to a student health survey, the students who were least likely to engage in risky sexual behavior were those whose parents talked with them about their sexual behavior and had sexuality education in school.

"Talking about sexuality isn't dangerous, it doesn't make people have sex," Swenson said. "I think people think family planning clinics are encouraging promiscuity, when in fact, we are some of the only people talking to people about the consequences and ramifications of sex and how to keep themselves safe."

Contrary to what people may think, family planning also doesn't mean abortion, Congrave said.

"If we have good family planning, there would be no need for people to want

an abortion," she said. "If people had accessibility to birth control, very seldom would unplanned pregnancy happen."

Planned Parenthood has been upfront about abortions, but Swenson said she wants to make it clear they don't provide abortions at the family planning center. "No money goes to abortion from our funding," Swenson said.

The services provided by Koochiching Family Planning includes: free pregnancy testing, affordable birth control options, exams, testing for sexually transmitted diseases and emergency contraception. Many of the center's patients are uninsured or under-insured, so having low-cost services is important, Swenson said.

"Because we're grant-driven, our prices are quite low," she said. "They can obtain a monthly birth control method for as low as \$5 a month."

The center's 10th anniversary gives Swenson the opportunity to increase awareness, she said. She's hoping to double their clients and help more women, as there's still many unplanned pregnancies in the U.S.

"Fifty percent of pregnancies in every socioeconomic group in the U.S. are unplanned," Swenson said. "The U.S. has a long way to go to get our act together regarding responsible sexuality."

Organizations partner to raise playground funds

Backus and Stewart's Super One Foods seek to boost community morale while replacing old equipment

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Officials at Backus Community Center and Stewart's Super One Foods announce a partnership on Pennies for Play, a fundraising project to raise money for new playground equipment at Green Acres Park.

Dennis Jonson, International Falls street commissioner, said the equipment at the Sixth Avenue East park was originally installed in the late 80s-early 90s. With childhood obesity rates rising, a release said Backus wants to keep kids interested in playing outdoors by providing them with fun, safe and up-to-date parks to play in.

"Backus Community Center is more than just a building. We are a dedicated group of board members, staff and volunteers who want to improve the quality of life in our area one project and event at a time," said Ward Merrill, Backus Executive Director. "We know funding is tight all over but this project proves that every penny counts."

Over a six-month period, Backus will collect donations, large and small, for the purchase of new playground equipment. Collection containers will also be placed at International

Falls businesses. Any business wanting a collection container can contact Robin Bjorkquist, Backus event coordinator, at 285-7225.

Stewart's Super One Foods will boost the effort by marking select items each week that when purchased, a portion of the sale will go towards the project.

"This is a great opportunity to try something new and make the project a true community effort", said David Stewart, owner of Stewart's Super One Foods. "Watch our weekly newspaper ad for products to buy. We'll also include a running total of how much has been collected, so the public can see the progress."

Pennies for Play will officially be launched on Thursday during "Trick or Treat Street at Backus."

"It's a great time to kick off a kid-based project during a kid-focused event", said Bjorkquist. "We have invited businesses to hand out candy in our building so little ghosts and goblins can have a fun, safe and warm trick-or-treat experience."

Trick or treating at Backus runs from 4-6 p.m. Thursday and anyone wishing to donate to the Pennies for Play project can do so that night.

For more information, visit www.backusab.org.

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