

## Community Health Promoter Program

# Health in your hand

Belmont Baptist Church's clinic is the base for free health education classes.

By Amy Hanek  
Special to The Roanoke Times

On a recent Tuesday night, about 20 adult students gathered at Belmont Baptist Church in Roanoke. After 30 minutes of fried chicken and bread pudding, everyone quieted down to listen as Gerri McDaniel began class.

McDaniel, the parish nurse coordinator for the Roanoke Valley Baptist Association's Faith Community Nurse Program, is helping teach the Community Health Promoter Program, held each week at the Health Management Center, the church's free clinic.

The Community Health Promoter Program provides free peer health education. The free classes are designed to give health education back to the community in hopes that graduates will volunteer their services to their churches, schools, neighborhoods and especially clinics.

The have been planned, organized and executed by Belmont Baptist, New Horizons Healthcare Center, Roanoke Valley Baptist Association's Faith Community Nurse Program and Jefferson College of Health Sciences. Even though the first round of classes was held last fall, McDaniel said the idea for them came much earlier.

"This has been a dream for the last 10 years, and all the pieces just never came together," she said.

After waiting to find a clinic that would take patients referred from the church's free clinic, the pieces are now in place and working well together, McDaniel said.

Eileen Lepro, the executive director of New Horizons Healthcare, which offers care for the uninsured and underinsured, said she crossed paths with McDaniel last

year when New Horizons began looking into peer health education.

Jefferson College of Health Sciences also has played a role in the success of the program.

Annette Strickland, an assistant professor at the college, said students in the program taught Community Health Promoter Program classes in the fall, and the school's nursing faculty served as mentors. Classes began again in February, but with the Jefferson College nursing faculty teaching.

On April 21, class participants will receive certification as community health

providers. Each also will receive a blood pressure cuff, stethoscope and thermometer.

Although there are high hopes, participants will not be committed to anything specific once classes have ended.

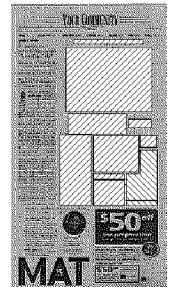
Lepro said of the 11 students who received certification in the fall, five have participated

in events such as health fairs, screenings, educational forums and peer health assistance.

Rayma Mills, a participant in the program, said she's already beginning to use the information she gained.

She said that last week a woman was sick in front of the 17th Street community center, where she works to hand out food. Mills felt comfortable assessing the woman's health and even called an ambulance for her.

"This is where the health care program came in handy, because I recognized symptoms," Mills said.



Mills also plans to donate some of her time back into the Health Management Center's clinic after graduation.

**For more information  
about the Community  
Health Promoter Program,  
call Melinda Hartley at  
New Horizons Healthcare  
at 362-0360.**



Barbara Myler bags vegetables recently at Belmont Baptist Church. Myler participates in the community nursing program and said she hopes to eventually take nursing classes.



Photos by JEANNA DUERSCHERL | The Roanoke Times

Gerri McDaniel checks Lorine Tyler's blood pressure at Belmont Baptist Church, where she helps teach health education.