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## **Hearts That Care Medical Clinic opens**

For Linda Shatswell, the new Hearts That Care Medical Clinic in downtown Lawton is a godsend.

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Shatswell, 54, has been without health insurance since she was laid off in January 2006, about 10 months after national retailers Sears and Kmart merged. With more than 32 years on the job and a little wage seniority under her belt, she was dismissed from her Kmart jewelry counter job on Northwest 38th Street so expenses could be cut. A type 2 diabetic who has high blood pressure and high cholesterol, Shatswell, has been able to find only part-time work with no benefits.

Shatswell, according to the National Coalition on Health Care, is one of 46 million Americans, or 15.7 percent of the population, without health insurance. That number has increased by 6 million since 2000, the coalition said. In Oklahoma, according to Insurance Commissioner Kim Holland's Web page, 20 percent of the population is believed to be without health insurance.

Clutching a brown 8-by-10-inch envelope under her arm containing her tax return and prescription bottles, Shatswell was one of more than an estimated 50 people who showed up at noon to make an appointment at the free clinic Thursday evening.

The clinic, which is directed by Dr. Wendy Bartanen, is located in what once was an automotive body shop building at Southwest Third Street and A Avenue. "We see working poor patients with chronic illnesses - high blood pressure, diabetes, coronary artery disease and depression - not acute illnesses," Bartanen said.

Alece Newell, a pharmacist volunteering at the clinic, said materials and labor were donated for all the construction work needed to open the clinic. She said additional personnel at the clinic, including three physicians, two registered nurses and a physician's assistant, are volunteers. A mobile X-ray unit was on site, too.

The program is supported by funds from Great Plains Improvement Foundation and the United Way and private donations. Bartanen said the clinic plans to ask the

city for federal Community Development Block Grant funds, too. "The only thing we have to pay is for the utilities," she said. The building, owned by Jeff Sadler, is donated.

The clinic requires a tax return or pay stub or other documents to show proof of eligibility and lack of health insurance to get one of the 30 appointments.

"My appointment is at 7 p.m.," Shatswell said. She said she made the appointment because she is worried about the impact on her body of not taking her medicines for six months.

"I just didn't have the \$78 for the appointment to get to the doctor or get the pills," she said. "I'd take about one pill a week to try to stretch them out as long as I could."

In addition to the appointment to get her medicine, Shatswell said she knows she needs blood tests to tell if the medicine or the lack of it has caused any damage to other organs. "Those tests can be over \$200 and I don't know

where I'll come up with that."

Shatswell said she was overwhelmed by the caring of the volunteers. She left at 10:40 p.m. Those who didn't get in this week will have opportunities on April 5 and April 19.

"It was well worth the wait," she said, adding she received medicine and the blood work.

"I once worked in claims processing and I'm going to call Dr. Wendy and see if I can volunteer at Hearts That Care Medical Clinic," Shatswell said.