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Lawton physicians planning a free clinic for people without insurance, show they have healing hands and hearts that care

PMuseLawton-Constitution.com Individuals, businesses, community service organizations and a local nonprofit ministry are all collaborating to provide a free medical clinic for those unable to get medical care in the Lawton-Fort Sill community.

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The clinic is the brainchild of Dr. Wendy Bartanen, a family practice physician. It is the fulfillment of one of her dreams to help those in need - those people she saw who were seemingly falling through the cracks. "The people we want to take care of are people without Medicare or insurance," Bartanen said. How it's happening She is working with Salt of the Earth Ministries, the local church that is providing space for the clinic in its building, the Great Plains Improvement Foundation and dozens of volunteers. Together they will provide a one-day-a-month operation that will offer free medical services to individuals who cannot afford health insurance, or those who have no other health and medical benefits. The City of Lawton provided the funds through a grant to GPIF. The money will pay for the startup costs for the project. In the future, the clinic will have to find additional money. "We're looking at grants and ways to keep it going," Bartanen said. The church, which is in the former Roosevelt Elementary School building at 1502 SW I Avenue, is providing the clinic with four rooms, including a large classroom that will be divided into four exam rooms. The clinic will also house its own pharmacy, a reception room and an office for the volunteer doctors to use.

Healthy dose of volunteerism A committee of volunteers has banded together to coordinate recruitment, donations, publicity, equipment and supplies, volunteers, infrastructure and construction for the project. Other people working on the project include Sharon Smith, Jasper Grigg, Yolie Meyers, Rebecca Zamarripa, Dorothy Mechanic and Sandra Wardell, to name a few. Apostle Roderick Jackson, pastor of Salt of the Earth, said, "I think it's a wonderful thing. We not only have an opportunity to serve the people in our church, but we also

have an opportunity to serve the people in the community. We are looking forward to meeting natural and spiritual needs in the community." Grigg, a volunteer member of the steering committee, is responsible for the construction portion of the clinic. He gathered workers from First Baptist Church to build the exam rooms, partitions for the hallways and remodeling of the old teacher's lounge to convert it into the pharmacy. Support from businesses The committee is joining with businesses and other organizations in the community to provide equipment, medicine, medical supplies and personnel to operate the clinic. Alece Howell is the pharmacy director, and Lannita Conway will work with the medical assistance program through Comanche County Memorial Hospital to get medicine. The idea began with a visit to a similar operation in Duncan. "Lannita and I went to Duncan and toured the Compassion Clinic there," Bartanen said. "They had a community meeting last winter a clinic similar to this in Tulsa. We had some guidelines for a clinic. Great Plains said we have a building, but felt there was no way. "We heard about Roosevelt School through my office manager, Misty McPherson, who is a member of Salt of the Earth Ministries," Bartanen said. As the project progresses, Bartanen said, community involvement increases. "As we go, we get more help," she said. "We've had a lot of response from the community. We've talked to pharmacies, we've talked to Wal-Mart. It's really snowballing. To open doors Oct. 19 The clinic will start Oct. 19. It will be open one Thursday a month to start. Eventually the clinic will be open from 6-9 p.m. once a week. It will be open on a walk-in basis, and no appointments will be taken. A blood sugar machine will be available, but the clinic is not set up to do lab work, just "basic stuff," the doctor said. "If a patient needs more help, it's our job to assist them further," Bartanen said. "But we will do no emergency trauma. We've been discussing transportation. That's another aspect of volunteerism." The clinic will be set up to handle acute illnesses, joint injuries, bronchitis, pneumonia, upper respiratory and ear infections, stomach ailments, urinary tract infections, high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, among other things. The name of the facility will be Great Plains Volunteer Health Clinic. For more information, call 353-2364. The free clinic is Bartanen's way of giving back to the community. Bartanen said, "I worked in Immediate Care and they closed it. Then I saw that there was nothing for people who didn't have any insurance. Most had to go to the emergency room. Doctors in the community can't keep giving free care. I can't pay my help if I keep doing that. 'It's amazing' "Dr. Stan Jackson (and) Krista Gordon are coming along to help, as well as Dr. Ann Warn, an ophthalmologist,

and a psychologist," Bartanen said. Ward clerks are recruiting other doctors. "It's amazing how interest has blossomed," Bartanen said. "I'm just humbled by that." Two exam tables have been donated by the Great Plains Improvement Foundation, and when it opens, the free clinic will have an electrocardiogram, autoclave and other medical equipment, such as breathing machines. The committee is also asking drug companies for donations for the pharmacy.

Copyright 2002 by The Lawton Constitution, All rights Reserved. Dr. Wendy Bartanen stands in the doorway of the pharmacy that will be set up in her new free clinic. The clinic will be open once a month for those who cannot otherwise afford medical treatment.