

Salud celebrates stimulus funds with clinic expansion

WATSONVILLE -- Celebrating Salud Para la Gente's expanded clinic made possible by federal stimulus money, Rep. Sam Farr came to Watsonville Wednesday to see what a \$900,000 grant had created.

The Carmel Democrat spoke at an event commemorating the one-year anniversary of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act outside the renovated Clinica del Valle del Pajaro building at Watsonville Community Hospital.

The clinic, part of Salud -- a full-service community health care nonprofit that means "Health for the People" -- received federal money to expand its facilities and to create jobs. The Recovery Act allocated \$787 billion nationally to public works spending and tax cuts.

The expansion of Salud, which began in October, will wrap up this month. The 170-member organization used the funds to create 9,000 square feet of new space that will house pediatrics, general medical practices, dental and vision facilities and more. Additionally, the organization plans to hire two new physicians and it anticipates being able to serve more than 1,300 new patients through March 2011. It currently employs 16 physicians, 10 dentists and one optometrist, among others.

Farr, standing with a gathering of the workers who participated in the renovation, addressed about 65 people at the outdoor event, including physicians, police officers and construction workers, saying that he saw the Recovery Act as an opportunity to act locally, and sees it's payoff.

"It was about clever investments to grow the economy," Farr said. "It wasn't just spend money, go shopping."

As the representative of Santa Cruz, San Benito and Monterey counties, Farr said it was his duty to find the most appropriate ways to integrate the Recovery Act's funds into his congressional district.

"This is a remarkable organization, integrated with the Pajaro Valley Unified School District," Farr said. "I'm really proud that this is working, and this has to be told."

While acknowledging that the Recovery Act remains a divisive issue in Congress, Farr argued that those who are claiming that the act didn't help them are not fully aware of its impact.

"A third of all this money went to tax breaks," Farr said. "People say this didn't do anything for them. Hell if it didn't. It has had consequences."

Frank Church, project manager of the renovation, said that through the project, many Watsonville residents were able to get work. Church estimates that more than 5,100 hours of work were generated.

"That's a lot of man hours and a lot of people who didn't have to sit at home," Church said.

Lindsey Connor of Connor Plumbing Inc. in Watsonville, said last year "was a very frightening time for the construction industry. I was extremely grateful to be involved in this project. It provided much-needed employment and stability."

Sara Clarenbach said Salud, which has been in operation since 1980, is there for those who need medical assistance and don't know where to turn.

"We provide care to everybody who walks in the door, no matter what's wrong with them, as long as it's something that we're competent to treat," she said.

For information on Salud, visit www.splg.org or call 728-8250, ext. 1005.