



HealthCare Consumer

Newsletter of the Champaign County Health Care Consumers

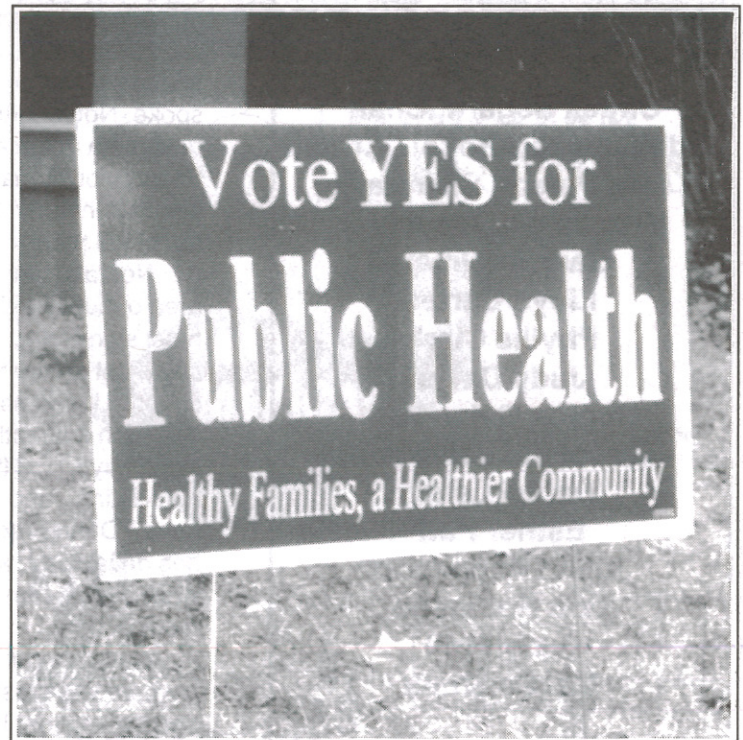
Public Health Referendum Wins

November 5, 1996 marked a milestone in the fight for access to public health for the 75,000 residents of rural Champaign County. As the results came in, the more than 1,000 volunteers who sacrificed their time, money, and energy to work on the public health campaign saw their months of work pay off. On election day, a majority of the voters (34,023), went to the bottom of the ballot and voted to establish a county-wide public health department.

Though the Farm Bureau mounted an extensive campaign against the department, public information officer Amy Rochkes stated in the November 5 *News-Gazette* that the Bureau intended to go along with the results of the election, saying "The voters have spoken. If the people want to have a county health district, we are willing to work with them on it." Within days, however, the Bureau had a change of heart, and decided to fight the establishment of a public health department for the rural residents of the county.

Friends of Public Health were quickly reminded that winning the vote to establish a department is only the first step in making public health available to all county residents. Within days of the election, the Bureau announced they would ask the County Board to use tax dollars to fund a lawsuit questioning the legality of the referendum.

Overwhelmed by the public outrage over their request for a frivolous, taxpayer-financed lawsuit to challenge the referendum, the Bureau decided against asking taxpayers to foot the bill, but did not rule out the



possibility of using their own funds to take legal action to halt implementation. They also announced they will no longer make their plans public.

As the Bureau and others tried to turn back the clock on the November 5 mandate, Friends of Public Health was already discussing what actions were needed to implement public health for the county. Campaign organizer Alisa Simon discussed with members the next step: levying a tax for the county and appointing members of a Board of Health. County Board members' open resistance to a department has alerted Friends of Public Health to the struggles ahead.

A Public Health Task Force has been created in order to monitor the activities of both the County Board and the newly appointed Board of Health, to help ensure that they are being held accountable to the expressed will of the voters. The Task Force will meet with elected officials, determine strategy, and take action if the County Board deliberately attempts to derail the effort to bring public health services to all of Champaign County. Anyone interested in taking part should contact Alisa at 352-6533.

Winter, 1997

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Health Care Consumer

is published quarterly by the Champaign County Health Care Consumers, a grassroots not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring accessible, affordable health care for all.

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Volunteer Profile: Netta Gillespie

by Susan Pierce

When Netta Gillespie contacted the CCHCC Hotline roughly a year ago, she was most impressed by the responsiveness and genuinely caring attitude of the people to whom she spoke. Not long thereafter, she became a volunteer Hotline Advocate. She obviously has enjoyed the direction her involvement has taken her since then.

Netta's primary emphasis is in the area of public aid — clearly one of the most significant, most grumbled about, and least understood issues in the country. It seems that the people who deal with it directly realize that it is, as Netta says, "...difficult to get, humiliating, and not what people need." During recent months, Netta has developed "a special interest in what people must endure to get a medical card."

Netta is now retired from the U of I, where she was Coordinator of Video and International Television at the language lab. She has a master's degree in radio and TV, and a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology. In the '70s, she was on staff for the Champaign Community Relations Department as a mediator for citizen complaints about city services; she did staff work for the Fair Housing Board and the Human



Relations Commission; and she also served as Telephone Counselor for Hotline for Youth.

She spent many years in the role of wife and mother, and her offspring are now out of the nest. She is also a writer, having written short stories and a book, as yet unpublished.

At CCHCC, she belongs to the Senior Task Force in addition to her Hotline work. She praises the CCHCC organization for its very "respectful way of using volunteers," and for the fact that many problems are actually "fed into policy." She is excited about the many students who volunteer there, and about the invaluable "community skills" that they are learning.

Having long sensed the need for universal health care, Netta is now so actively involved in the health care arena and at such close range that she is even more ardent in her conviction that universal health care must become a reality. Furthermore, she says, it will "serve as a catalyst for change" in crucial interrelated areas.



**CCHCC staff and
volunteers joined
during the holidays
with Friends of
Public Health to
celebrate a year of
progress.**

SENIOR CITIZEN TASK FORCE

Prescription Drug Alert: Synthroid - 60 pills @ .088 mg

Carle RX Express Pharmacy	383-3250	\$18.18	Osco Drug Pharmacy	352-4272	\$16.01(\$7.60)
Christie Clinic Pharmacy	366-1278	\$18.39	Rehg's Pharmacy	586-4914	\$19.25
Covenant Outpatient Pharm.	337-4545	(\$9.28)	St. Joseph Apothecary	469-2232	\$19.99
Doctors Building Pharmacy	356-1819	\$11.28	Schnucks Supermarket	351-8497	\$13.39
Jerry's IGA Pharmacy (D)	367-4390	\$21.80	Target Stores	355-3345	\$16.39(\$5.99)
Kmart Super Centers	356-2839	\$20.97	Walgreen's Drug Stores	356-0521	\$14.79(\$6.59)
Medicine Shoppe (D)	352-7070	\$14.25	Wal-Mart Discount Cities	352-1490	\$18.84
Meijers Pharmacy	353-4000	\$16.74	(\$)=Generic (D)=Free delivery Prices as of 12/5/96		

Medigap Insurance Premiums Skyrocket

Premiums for Medicare supplemental insurance, commonly referred to as Medigap insurance, skyrocketed between 1995 and 1996, according to a state by state report released by the national health consumer group Families USA. On average, the company with the largest Medigap sales (Prudential) increased premiums by 23 percent.

These increases were nearly nine times higher than increases in Social Security benefits (2.6%), and more than double the Medicare inflation rate. Of the 35 states examined, the Prudential policies increased by 30 percent or more in 11 states, and between 20 and 30 percent in 15 states.

"The sharp increases in Medigap insurance premiums are a threatening prospect for older Americans who are simply trying to make ends meet," said Ron Pollack, executive director of Families USA. "When premiums increase twenty, thirty, and forty percent in one year, many of our nation's elderly are going to be squeezed out of the Medigap market."

"Last year, Congressional leaders had a plan to double Medicare premiums for older Americans," Pollack said. "With Medigap premiums rising so fast, and if Medicare premiums rise, seniors will be forced to make some tough decisions regarding whether they can afford to pay for the basic health care services they need and worked so hard for."

"Medicare 100 and Medicare Plus help take care of that need," said Ruth Baker, a member of CCHCC and the Medicare 100 program. "Although it isn't as portable as Medigap, for those who can't afford anything beyond Medicare, CCHCC and Covenant's Medicare 100 can be a godsend."

One of the reasons that Medigap premiums are rising so quickly is a lack of caps on hospital outpatient charges. In addition, HMO's are enrolling younger and healthier seniors, leaving the older and sicker seniors in the Medicare fee-for-service system.

Page sponsored by Senior Citizen Task Force

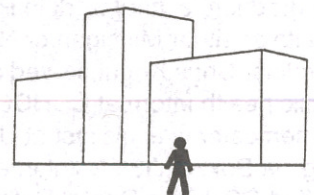
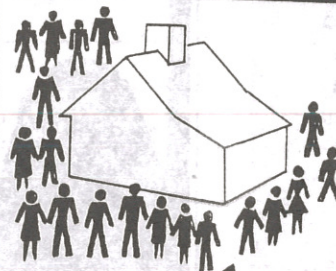
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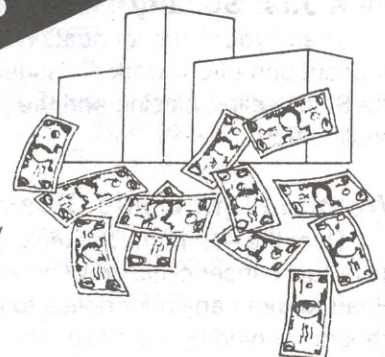
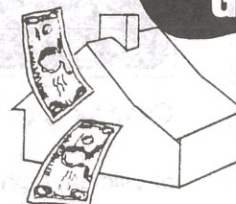
LONG TERM CARE: WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

WHAT AMERICANS PREFER

By a massive 19 to 1 majority, Americans who need long term care prefer to be cared for in their own home rather than in a nursing home...



WHERE THE MONEY GOES



... nonetheless, we as a society spend \$6 on nursing homes for every \$1 we spend on home care. Maybe it's time for long term care reform.

SENIOR WATCH IS AN EDITORIAL SERVICE OF FAMILIES USA FOUNDATION

CCHCC Briefs

Illinois Lawmakers Work to Protect Bad Doctors

Frances Nelson Update

Frances Nelson Community Health Center is still open and providing services at the Carver Street Clinic under an interim grant to the C-U Public Health District. This month a competitive grant proposal is being submitted to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services for more permanent federal funding for the community health center.

As a part of the proposal, the Health Center is looking for volunteers to serve on the board of directors. To get more information about serving on the Community Health Center Board or on the Health Center proposal call Nancy at CCHCC 352-6533.

Staff Changes

We would like to say goodbye to key staff and volunteers. Alisa Simon, who started with CCHCC on the hotline and worked on the public health campaign, is leaving this month. Alisa will be leaving us to travel the far east before beginning her graduate school work in Public Health at either Michigan or North Carolina. Chris Kogut served as a public health intern at CCHCC. The fall semester was his last at U of I. Virginia Box, a VISTA Volunteer who staffed CCHCC's Dental Referral Program, is leaving to move to Arkansas to be with her family. Thanks for all you've done. Next issue, look to see who has joined us.

Unitarian Universalist Fund for a Just Society

Thank you to the foundation for your support of our work on issues like the Sidney clinic closing and the public health effort.

Women Fight Clinic Closing

Over the summer, Christie closed its breast cancer clinic on Windsor Road, without any prior notice to those patients served by the clinic. The clinic was staffed by an oncological

The Illinois Medical Practices Act, a law that defines how doctors are monitored in Illinois, was prematurely rushed through the Illinois General Assembly in December. The public was given no prior notice, and consequently, the Illinois Medical Practices Act was extended into the year 2006. Since the results of the investigation have not come in yet, this hasty decision may end up costing peoples' lives.

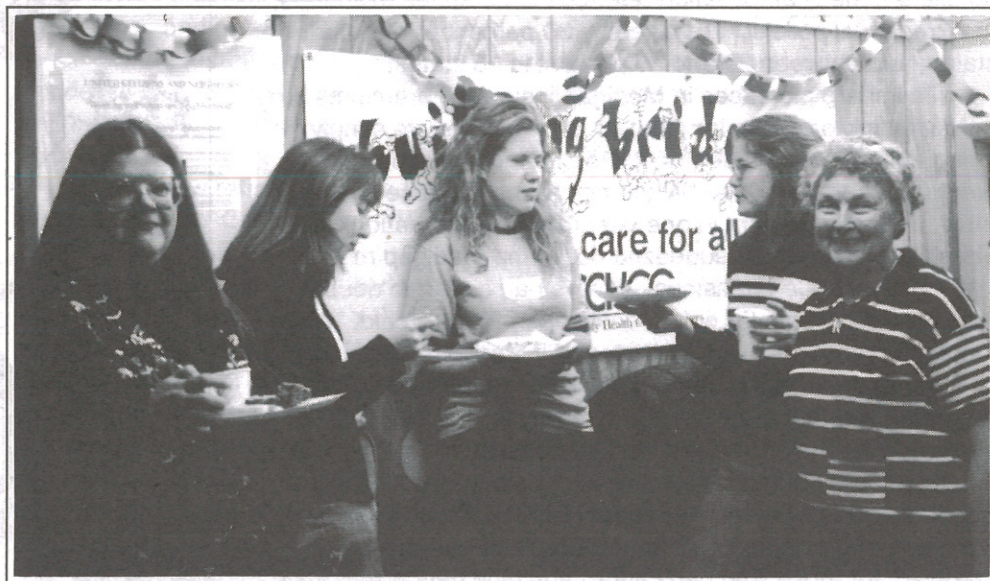
Due to numerous consumer complaints last year, the Illinois Auditor General began an investigation of the Department of Professional Regulations. The investigation was to explore the possible faulty regulation of doctors.

The results from the Auditor General's investigation could be

used to reduce injury and death due to incompetent or impaired doctors. But just weeks before the investigation was over, the Medical Practices Act was rushed through, not to be looked at for ten more years.

Now the final decision lies in Governor Edgar's hands. Edgar can use his amendatory veto power to prevent the Act from being renewed without debate for ten more years. CCHCC sent out an action alert through the Health Action Network, urging people to call or write Edgar.

You can make a difference by calling Edgar at 782-6830 and leaving a message for him to use his amendatory veto power to delete the Medical Practices Act from HB632. For more information, call Sanjay at 352-6533.



Good food, good company, and good times for all at CCHCC's holiday celebration.

physician, highly regarded by the community. The Christie board moved this physician to the clinic on University Avenue, and severely cut the hours he could see patients.

Numerous complaints came in to the Health Care Hotline about the

clinic closing. A group of women, frustrated by Christie's actions, got together to fight the sudden changes. They succeeded in pressuring Christie to release the physician from his contract to allow him to open a private practice in Champaign this month.

Lease Agreement Last Step in Opening Sidney Clinic

Board members and volunteers for Community for Family Health have worked hard to raise over \$20,000 to open the medical facility in Sidney. In a matter of only two months, they have reached their first goal. With a doctor and staff ready to provide services, and donations coming in steadily, the community is anxious to see the facility open early in 1997.

It is now up to Covenant and the Village to work out a lease agreement. Community for Family Health hopes to have local services available as soon as possible, seeing as the weather may make it increasingly difficult for people to drive to town. This is particularly important for seniors and those who lack transportation. The facility can be opened two weeks after the lease is signed. It would be a great gift to the local communities if the medical facility could be in full operation by the new year.

At the November 21 Illinois Rural Health Conference, speakers

discussed how the days of the traditional rural practice in a small town, owned and run by an independent physician, are gone. Doctors today typically have to repay loans of \$100,000, and insurance premiums that can run over \$40,000 a year. Furthermore, equipment is expensive. For example, an examination table costs around \$8,000, and reimbursement for Medicare in rural areas is low. Despite these challenges, citizens in other rural areas have been successful in establishing or maintaining health facilities. In Tuscola, concerned citizens raised \$55,000, and in Homer, citizens formed a non-profit corporation which raised over \$25,000.

Thank you to all who have donated to Community for Family Health. For more information on the Sidney clinic or what you can do to help, please call Jan Keller at 688-2416.

Join the Health Action Network!



The Health Action Network is a program of Champaign County Health Care Consumers that is dedicated to empowering consumers of health care through coordinated action.

When you join the Health Action Network, you will receive an action alert (limited to one a month) as issues arise in our community. Actions range from a phone call to a legislator about a bill, to attending meetings and forums on the local health care scene. The principle behind the Network is the idea that even a simple phone call can make an impact when we organize our neighbors to do the same.

To join the Network, just call or write Sanjay Garla at 352-6533, 44 Main Street, Suite 208, Champaign, IL 61820.

CCHCC 1996 Phone-a-Thon a Success

The staff and board of CCHCC thanks all of the volunteers for donating their time and effort to making the Phone-a-Thon a success. Our thanks also to the businesses that donated products or services. Please patronize businesses that support CCHCC.

The Yoga Institute
Skateland
Ned Kelly's Steakhouse
Round Barn
Simply Jewel
Hair by Larry
Dom's Patio Village
Bergner's
Daddy-O's
Murphy's Pub
Mountain Jack's
City of New Orleans
The Elite Diner
The Great Impasta
The Esquire
Lilia Peters
Sam's Cafe
Worldwide Gifts
Dewey's Pizza
The Sea Boat
Sicilian Brothers
Sweet Indulgence
Sweet Betsy's
County Market
Little Italy
Pages for all Ages
Spring Jade
St. Louis Bread Company
The Office
The Office II
Central Tap
Dairy Queen Brazier
Home Stretch
Chili's
Chuck Segard
Phyllis Clark

Effort underway to protect and expand toxics law

At a recent board meeting, the Champaign County Health Care Consumer Board endorsed a national effort to protect and expand the Community Right to Know Act. This law, created in 1986, requires public disclosure of toxic contaminants in the environment.

The Right to Know Act has proven effective in reducing the environmental health risks of toxins. According to David Kovic, field organizer for Illinois Public Interest Research Group (IPIRG), "The more people are in tune with what toxins are produced by industries in their community, the more these industries have had to either reduce the amounts of chemicals they use or find safer alternatives.

"By getting more people involved, we can work not only to maintain, but to include more contaminants under the Community Right to Know Act, so that the American public will have full knowledge of the chemicals they are exposed to."

Kovic says many Americans are kept in the dark about the kinds of chemicals released into the environment. "Multinational corporations use more than 72,000 different toxic chemicals, with an additional 1,000 created every year for industrial use. These chemicals end up in the foods we eat and the products we use in our homes. These same chemicals have been known to cause cancer, birth defects, and reproductive disorders."

"Under the current Right to Know Act, industries are required to report only 5% of the toxins they produce, so

most people don't even know what they are being exposed to," Kovic says.

The problem does not stop there, however. In a letter sent out by USPIRG, the worst pollutants come from such sources as utilities, mining, incinerators, and oil and gas companies; yet these industries are required to report few, if any, of their toxic emissions.

According to USPIRG estimates, chemical industries have contributed over \$56 million to congressional campaigns in an attempt to weaken environmental laws like the Right to Know Act.

Companies responsible for the pollution are working at many levels to reduce government regulations. The Chemical Manufacturers Association has sued the Environmental Protection Agency to limit the number of toxic chemicals companies are required to report.

At a press conference on

December 5 in Champaign, spokespeople for IPIRG encouraged local citizens to get involved in a letter writing campaign to put pressure on state and federal legislators to expand the Act. USPIRG hopes Congress will make this issue a top priority when it goes back into session in January. For those interested in participating in the Community Right to Know Campaign, contact Patrick Oray with the Champaign County Health Care Consumers at 352-6533, or David Kovic with IPIRG at 202 South State St., Chicago, IL 60604-1905, or call (312) 986-8211.



Hospital Incinerator Emissions on the Ballot

United Citizens and Neighbors (UCAN), a local neighborhood organization, is fighting to place a referendum on the April 1 ballot calling for a moratorium on medical waste incinerators located in residential neighborhoods. "Right now Carle and Covenant are burning medical waste and plastics daily, releasing dioxin and other dangerous compounds into the air," said David Rein of UCAN.

According to the EPA, medical waste incinerators are the largest single source of dioxin and mercury into the environment. As Rein explained, "these deadly compounds are extremely dangerous because they do not readily break down. Instead they accumulate in the body, and continual low-level exposure leads to a build-up of these substances in tissues."

Dioxin is a potent cancer-causing agent, and is associated with numerous reproductive and developmental effects, including decreased fertility, birth defects, endometriosis, and miscarriages. Mercury, which affects the central nervous system, is also very toxic to humans, even in small doses.

"Unfortunately, a loophole in federal regulations allows medical waste incinerators to operate without any monitoring or controls for dioxin emissions. Although the EPA is currently under court order to close that loophole, proposed regulations would grandfather in existing medical waste incinerators, and apply more rigorous regulations only to newly constructed incinerators," Rein explained.

To get involved, or for more information, call Keon or David with UCAN at 352-6533.

Advocate's Advice: Interest Rates on Medical Bills

Calls to the Consumer Health Hotline have raised concerns about a billing practice to begin at Carle Clinic January 1. After that date, consumers with outstanding bills will be charged 18% annual interest (1.5% monthly). According to a spokesperson at Carle Foundation Hospital, this rate applies to the clinic only, not the hospital.

A staff person at Carle Clinic said the interest will be added 28 days after the due date. In cases where insurance is being billed, 45 days are allowed for the company to make payment. After 45 days, the patient has another 28 days to make payment before the interest rate is added.

According to the Illinois Attorney General, Illinois has no usury laws regulating whether medical facilities can add interest to their bills, nor is there a cap on the amount of interest hospitals and clinics can charge. The Attorney General's office also noted

that clinics and other businesses are expected to give fair notice of such changes. Hotline callers say they received notice in the most recent bills.

Carle isn't the only local clinic to add interest to outstanding bills. For several years, Christie Clinic has charged 18% annually on outstanding bills. However, Covenant Medical Center doesn't use such charges.

Because the charges aren't illegal, not many avenues are open to consumers for whom this will be a hardship. Consumers need to be

extra careful to protect against overcharges. This is most important, since billing mistakes will be more costly with the addition of interest.

As soon as one receives a bill, it should be gone over carefully to find any mistakes. Consumers should be certain their bills reflect: procedures performed; supplies and therapies actually used; consultations with specialists who actually treated the patient; and no mistakes or overcharges. The Consumer's Medical Desk Reference points out "There's no getting around it: If you want to avoid paying for what you did not get, you have to go over the bill item by item, no matter how long it takes."

If you're having billing problems and need assistance, call the Consumer Health Hotline at 352-6533.

Annual Raffle a Success

CCHCC's annual raffle raised over \$1,000 for the Hotline! The drawing was held at our holiday party, attended by over 100 people on Dec. 13 to celebrate victories and accomplishments of the year.

The winners:

Ellen McDowell:

Dinner for 2 at Kamakura; 2 tickets to Krannert; a bottle of champagne.

Jan Wilson:

Brunch for two at Silvercreek

Connie Justice:

Dinner for two at Land of Mexico

Aimee Olson:

\$50 Mary Kay gift certificate

Suzanne McCabe:

Dessert for two at Silvercreek

Many thanks to the following donors of raffle prizes:

Kamakura Japanese Restaurant

Land of Mexico

Silvercreek

Krannert Performing Arts Center

Lilia Peters, Mary Kay Consultant



Join the Health Care Consumers today!
Just clip and mail...

YES! I'd like to renew my membership with CCHCC!

(please clip out and return with your check)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$120 - IMPACT Member | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 - Individual Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$60 - Program Sponsor | <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 - Fixed Income Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$40 - Family Member | <input type="checkbox"/> Other \$ _____ |

Change of Address:

Name/Phone: _____ / _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Contributions to CCHCC are tax-deductible

Please return to: CCHCC, 44 E. Main St. Suite 208, Champaign, IL 61820

Twenty Years of Change 1977-1997 **Champaign County Health Care Consumers** **20th Anniversary Dinner**

Saturday, March 15, 1997

The Regent Ballroom and Banquet Center
1406 Regency Drive, Savoy
(behind the Savoy 14 Theaters)

The Champaign County Health Care Consumers will be celebrating twenty years of social change at its annual awards dinner. A keynote speaker, community awards, and a buffet dinner will all be a part of this celebration. Much of the event is still being organized, and we are looking for volunteers to help out at a variety of levels, from planning logistics to providing child care. Let Nancy Greenwalt know how you can help by calling 352-6533.

Tickets go on sale in February. Free child care, rides, & discounted tickets are available. To reserve a seat, or make a donation to underwrite the cost of discounted tickets, call David Anderson or Linda Turnbull at 352-6533.



CCHCC Chair Chuck Segard, County Auditor Gerrie Parr, & public health volunteer Cameron Satterthwaite share the spirit at CCHCC's holiday celebration.

Champaign County
Health Care Consumers
44 East Main, Suite 208
Champaign, IL 61820

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Logo Contest

CCHCC is looking for a local artist to draft a logo to use as a part of the dinner celebration, as well as in much of the organization's materials over the next year. We are looking for an idea that expresses our gratitude to CCHCC's volunteers and donors over the years, and our tremendous pride for what CCHCC has been able to accomplish.

The artist of the winning logo will be recognized at the dinner, in the newsletter, and awarded a free ticket to the Awards Dinner. For more information (or to submit entries) contact our office at 352-6533, 44 Main Street, Suite 208, Champaign, IL 61820.

Board Elections

It's time to make nominations for the CCHCC Board of Directors. Board members are responsible for monitoring the finances of the organization and guiding the program and issue work. The Board meets monthly, with committees likely requiring an additional monthly meeting.

The organization is looking for people who believe in citizen action and share CCHCC's mission, including the idea that meaningful reforms in health care will come only with the active involvement of consumers.

To apply for the board or to make a nomination, contact Board Chair Chuck Segard by calling or writing the CCHCC office.