

Rural health care centers get \$50,000 shot in arm

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Contributing Writer*

A man behind the Cane Bay Plantation development in Berkeley County might be setting a new trend, but it's not for his community design.

Last month, Ben Gramling III, president of Gramling Brothers Real Estate and Development, presented \$50,000 to two Berkeley County health projects.

"I would like to think that you will start to see more developers do something in counties that they are successful in," Gramling said.

Gramling, who resides in Charleston, said he wanted to give back to Berkeley County because of the success of his Cane Bay Plantation project that will add thousands of homes to the county. He contacted Berkeley County Supervisor Jim Rozier to ask what the needs were.

Rozier's response, which is true of most rural areas, was "access to health care."

"If you look at Berkeley County on a map, it's larger than the state of Rhode Island," Gramling said. "It's the largest county in the state."

Berkeley County's rural residents don't have the same access to health care that the residents of Cane Bay Plantation will, he said.

"You don't want areas of the county not having proper health care. That's not good for anybody," Gramling said.

In Pineville, residents joined together to reopen the shuttered Maude Callen Health Center. In Cross, the Franklin C. Fetter Family Health Center hopes to expand its clinic. Gramling presented \$25,000 to each project.

"It's a nice thing to see a developer being that generous to the community," Rozier said. "I hadn't experienced it in the past. (Gramling) was offering to do that, not being asked, which makes him and his whole family outstanding citizens."

Maude Callen Health Center

Pineville's Maude Callen Health Center closed 20 years ago. It was named for Maude Callen, a nurse and midwife who traveled the roads to serve patients. Now the nearest center is about 30 miles away.

Residents have formed a board of directors to raise money to reopen the clinic. Board members said the clinic would serve residents of Pineville, St. Stephen, Russellville and the surrounding

community. Many residents choose not to seek medical attention when faced with the inconvenience of travel.

Only 2% of residents have a primary doctor, according to information from the board. Rubystene Mazyck, a board member, said school surveys in the area show most children don't go to the doctor unless they are ill, and when they do, it's most often a trip to the emergency room.

Berkeley County gave the center's deed to the Maude Callen Health Center board of directors in November.

The board needs about \$100,000 to begin renovations and about \$400,000 total. The board hopes to do some of the work through volunteers, and the \$25,000 will help immensely.

"This is the best donation we've been given. This is real good. This is a joy," said John Rembert, a board member and Pineville resident.

Cross Health Center

A donation to the Franklin C. Fetter Family Health Center will one day relieve traffic at its clinic in Cross. People line up around the building or wait in their cars to see a doctor. The clinic serves 350 to 400 patients a month in a 1,500-square-foot building that has two examination rooms.

"We are beyond capacity every day. It's not adequate for what we need to do for the clients that we have," said Ronald Ravenell, Franklin C. Fetter Family Health Center's executive director.

The Cross clinic opened in the 1960s and was first used by the Berkeley County Health Department.

"The building is beyond repairs and beyond any type of renovations," Ravenell said.

The nonprofit corporation hopes to open a 6,000-square-foot facility. Gramling's \$25,000 is the first major donation.

"We are certainly appreciative for Gramling Brothers, Mr. Rozier, Caldwell Pinckney and all the other council members of Berkeley County for working with us on this project because it's going to take the support of everyone to make it come to fruition," Ravenell said.

Using a tool

Gramling said he is confident both centers will use his donation effectively.

"Money is a tool just like a hammer or a saw or anything else. If you use it correctly, it can produce good results, and I think that is what they are going to do."

Gramling has also donated land to the Berkeley County School District, allowing schools to be built in his planned Cane Bay Plantation Community. The developer also hinted at future contributions.

"The last thing I want to do is make a living in the area and not give something back to it," Gramling said.

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