COUNTY CURRENTS: County mandated to provide health and welfare services

by Dave Cortese

Posted: 01/06/2010 02:34:48 PM PST

Updated: 01/06/2010 02:34:48 PM PST

Last month's cold front in Santa Clara County was a not so gentle reminder that winter is indeed here and we need to prepare ourselves for the cold months that lie ahead. For those who can afford it, this means setting our thermostat to the appropriate levels, stocking up on comfort food, dressing warmly to prevent catching cold/influenza, etc.

But what about our friends, family and acquaintances who do not have the basic necessities such as shelter, food and health insurance? How can we help them brave the winter season? When the cold weather hits, one of the first things to weaken is our immune system, making us vulnerable to cold and flu. The County of Santa Clara, despite the challenging economic times we're living through, is mandated to provide health and welfare services to its residents. We are also mandated to provide General Assistance and health care for the indigent in our community.

With the county unemployment rate hovering around 11.9 percent, it is likely that we each know at least one person or a whole family suffering in some manner, whose pains are more acute because of the winter. So I want to share with you some information on county services that might be useful in warming up someone's life:

Health coverage

The county helps provide access to health insurance through three primary programs: Medi-CAL, Healthy Families and Healthy Kids. Participation in these programs is dependent upon income, property, age, residency and immigration status. The Medi-CAL program is further broken down by families with children, children, pregnant women, adults (elderly, blind or disabled), nursing home care, refugees and confidential youth medical services.

Medical services are also coordinated through Valley Medical Center, which provides medical care to all residents of our county, regardless of their ability to pay.

If you or someone you know is in need of health insurance or medical services, please contact my office at 299-5030 or lara.mccabe@bos.sccgov.org.

Food insecurity

Food insecurity this is an emerging term for people who do not have enough income to cover their basic food needs. The county administers the food stamp program for single people and families who have limited or no income for food. Once eligibility is verified (based on statements of income and other criteria), food stamp clients are then given a plastic card to purchase food typically this card is good at most grocery stores. It is important to note that many legal non citizens can get food stamp benefits. Even if you can't get food stamp benefits for yourself, family members born in this country can. Many people think that because they have property such as furniture, clothing, jewelry and vehicles that this automatically disqualifies them from the food

Advertisement

SATISFFIES APPETITES.

SATISFFIES ACCOUNTANTS.

Dollar

Menu

SATISFFIES ALL DAY LONG.

Prices and participation may vary.
©2009 McDonald's.
stamp program. This is not so. The county distinguishes these properties from "countable property" such as cash on hand and bank accounts. These and other rules can be explained once the person meets with an eligibility officer.

Another great resource is the Second Harvest Food Bank. They distribute groceries to those who cannot afford to buy their own. They also have access to locations that serve hot meals, year round. People in need can call 1 (800) 984-3663 and talk with food bank staff in English, Spanish or Vietnamese.

If you or someone you know is in need of food assistance, please contact my office at 299-5030 or the-vu.nguyen@bos.sccgov.org.

Financial assistance

The county has limited provision to provide financial assistance to individuals and families with little or no income. Financial assistance includes cash assistance for families with children (CalWORKs), cash loans for adults (General Assistance), and cash assistance for refugees and immigrants. Participants in the CalWORKs program may also be required to participate in job preparation programs. As with the programs described above, eligibility has to be verified in order to participate. Programs like these oftentimes provide a much-needed boost to a single person or family experiencing a difficult time.

If you or someone you know is in need of financial assistance, please contact my office at 299-5030 or the-vu.nguyen@bos.sccgov.org.

Housing

I've talked before about the foreclosure rates in Santa Clara County and the difficulty in finding affordable housing solutions for single individuals and families. The county's Office of Affordable Housing focuses on developing and preserving housing units for lower income and special needs population. If you know of someone in immediate need, the county can guide you to one of the 26 emergency shelters that provide close to 1,000 beds year round (with additional beds available during the winter). These are not long-term accommodations but can help buy a little time until an individual or family can figure out their next steps.

If someone you know is in need of housing assistance, please contact my office at 299-5030 or mike.donohoe@bos.sccgov.org.

I know that times are tough but I also know that we will not abandon our friends and neighbors during this winter season. I hope you will take a minute to pass this information on to your contacts in the community.

* * *

Dave Cortese represents Milpitas, Berryessa and North San Jose on the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfies Appetites</th>
<th>Dollar Menu</th>
<th>Satisfies Accountants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Prices and participation may vary. ©2009 McDonald's.