

# Clinics back in business

□ Oregon City High School's health clinic is gearing up to reopen after a near-death experience

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A pioneering community health clinic at Oregon City High School is open again, thanks to some determined efforts to reverse a hasty round of budget cuts last year.

The School-Based Health

Center clinic was one of the first in the state-wide program, opened at the old high school in 1988. A sophisticated new facility was planned for it in the new high school on Beavercreek Road — but then funding was slashed just before they were to move in this school year.

Restoring the funding "was a great team effort," Rep. Dave Hunt said. "There was a lot of advocacy in the budget process — and then getting the dollars after they were appropriated."

Now the program is gearing up again, one clinic at the time. The Oregon City clinic is finally

moving into its new offices — vacant since the new campus opened to students in fall of 2003. Nurse Jackie Rose — one of the pioneers who fought to launch the OCHS clinic in '88 — said they will soon be open to provide students with a wide variety of community health services: "Vaccines, TB tests, we do the Hepatitis B, Hepatitis A, Measles, Mumps, Rubella, Tetanus — all of that sort of stuff — even when some of the kids have had to be on TB medication, where normally they would have had to go to the health



Jackie Rose in the newly-opened Oregon City High School clinic; in 1988 she fought to get the first health clinic at the school — one of the first in the state — opened despite community uncertainty. Photo by David Stroup

## Clinics: Gearing up to resume

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department, we do that here — so it makes it easier for them."

Rose said having the full community clinic — a big step up from a school nurse's office — right there on campus makes a tremendous difference for the students who need it.

"It's been very hard for me — coming back in here — and having these kids running up and stopping in and saying 'hi — we're so glad you're here.' When we were closing down we had kids come in and say 'how can this possibly be — there are so many kids who need it — they really need to be able to talk with someone about health issues.'"

### Services reconnected

The School-Based Health Center is really a miniature community health clinic — with a waiting room, examining room, semi-private space for students who need to lie down during the day, and a room where blood can be drawn and prepared for lab tests.

"We're trying to get laboratory manuals organized right now," Rose said — they're reconstructing the clinic as it existed almost a year ago when funding was slashed.

"There's one nurse for the whole district," Rose said. They don't overlap with her duties: "This really is a health clinic." Oregon is 49th worst in the country for the ratio of school nurses to students.

The clinic is run with joint

funding — the state, county and school district all play a part.

"It's actually like a private practice," Nurse Practitioner Tonya Inman said — she will be the main nurse at the clinic when it's ready to go. "Anything you would see a doctor or nurse practitioner for — you can come to us."

"This is primary health care," Rose said, "heavy on preventative care — we really focus on trying to keep people healthy... that's different than the school nurse's role."

Rose was nurse coordinator of the OCHS clinic for years — she retired when the center was closed, but she's come back as a consultant to reopen it. "There's a lot to know to get it up and running — and there wasn't anyone else to do it. I'm recreating what disappeared when it closed down."

Funding for the program was cut in the special session in March of 2003. Getting the money back wasn't easy.

"Everyone really stepped up at the end," Hunt said. "Because they knew that the kids really needed to be served."

"The real challenge came once the program had been cut in the middle of the last biennium," he said. "They closed the clinic — the RN went away — it was so difficult to get it reopened. It illustrates a broader point about the difficulty of restarting things after they've been closed."

"We had this great new facility," he said, "and the staffing money from the state

disappeared just before the school year was to begin."

The money was finally reinserted into the 2003-2005 budget: "It was one of the last additions we got in," he said.

Now the school-based clinics are working to reopen one by one. In Oregon City the clinic will serve a small town of 2,200 students.

"It's right here," Inman said, "they can come right in and you can use it — you develop a relationship. Even just for a throat lozenge or something for a tension headache — which otherwise wouldn't be available at school."

They do everything from pap smears to dealing with obesity or bulimia — and they serve a lot of students who don't have active parents, or who come from families too poor to afford any other kind of health care. They look to see if students using the clinic do have private health insurance or access to other resources — because they have to use their own resources as wisely as possible.

"The more people know how much bang we get for these relatively few bucks, the better," Hunt said. He said there's a big benefit in keeping the students healthy and in the classroom: "This is a very positive investment in the health and education of these children."