

Nonprofits receive \$2 million in grants

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Bill Silverfarb/Daily Journal
Sequoia Healthcare District Chief Executive Officer Lee Michelson mingles with guests at the district's annual Caring Community Awards reception at Ralston Hall in Belmont last night.

The Fair Oaks Intergenerational Center in Redwood City has ramped up the services it provides senior citizens by extensively evaluating its programs and its impacts to its clients.

The center is run by the Family Service Agency of San Mateo County, a nonprofit that provides a host of services across the county.

Fair Oaks was previously a traditional senior center that provided some meals and social interaction for older adults in south county.

After it received a grant from the Sequoia Healthcare District in 2007, the agency evaluated its services at Fair Oaks and realized some of its programs needed improvement, said Laurie Wishard, president of the Family Service Agency.

A number of wellness programs were established at the Fair Oaks center with the aid of the Sequoia grant, including the monitoring of blood-sugar levels, which a third of the center's clients did not do, Wishard said.

The simple blood tests have allowed the center's clients to become more aware of the risks of diabetes.

Measuring success in the health care field is not always easy.

Usually when a nonprofit agency requests grant money from Sequoia, a special tax district, it presents quantitative information, said Lee Michelson, Sequoia's chief executive officer.

Last night, at Sequoia's annual Caring Community Awards reception in Belmont, the Family Service Agency gave a presentation that demonstrated real success with its grant money by improving the

lives of seniors.

"People want to know their contributions make a difference," Michelson said. "Family Service Agency went way beyond our expectations in evaluating the service. They have provided more depth and measurement than was expected."

This year, Sequoia granted \$2 million in grants to 36 organizations that provide health care services in southern San Mateo County. The grants range from \$20,000 to \$100,000. Family Service Agency was awarded \$50,000 last night to provide nutrition and physical fitness activities for older adults.

Among the other grant recipients were Mission Hospice, Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse, the Cleo Eulau Center and Peninsula Volunteers, which operates Meals on Wheels.

Sequoia received 59 grant requests this year, the most it has ever received, Michelson said.

Sequoia Board President Don Horsley said the district took a different approach to doling out its grants this year by looking closely at what the greatest needs in the community are based on the poor economy and the lack of state and county funds to support health care services.

The district decided to support agencies this year that provide nutrition for the elderly and needy, services for persons with mental illness, advocacy for children in foster care and the physical and emotional needs of school children, Horsley said.

"These community-based organizations provide a vital service for the community that can't be met elsewhere," Horsley said.

The Caring Community Awards were held at Ralston Hall on the campus of Notre Dame de Namur University last night.

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