

HUSBAND AND WIFE: A VOLUNTEER TEAM

By Pat Greubel

April 11, 2011 was an important day for the Barrier Islands Free Medical Clinic (BIFMC) located on Maybank Highway on Johns Island. It marked the third anniversary of the clinic whose mission is to serve the health and wellness needs of the medically underserved who live or work on Johns, Wadmalaw or James Islands.

Two days later marked another milestone for the clinic. Sheridan Gibler, MD, a Seabrook Island resident and volunteer physician, treated their 10,000th patient! Three years, 10,000 patients is quite a feat for an organization that runs primarily on volunteer staffing. Dr. Gibler is one of 30 volunteer doctors donating their time to see patients each week. He is joined by his wife Karen, one of 28 registered nurses who help make this clinic a success.

After retiring from Fort Worth, the Giblers, a cardiologist and cardiac nurse, settled on Seabrook and knew they would do volunteer work of some kind. They soon read about the clinic and jumped on board. Working one or two afternoons a week, they see 20 to 25 patients a shift. This is quite a large increase from just one year ago. Dr. Gibler says the clinic is like a busy general practice. Treating 18 to 64 year olds, the physicians are mostly specialists, so they share their expertise where needed.

Dr. Gibler states the biggest issue for the patients they see is the undiagnosed and untreated cases of diabetes 1 & 2, and hypertension. These individuals are stabilized and started on proper medications. Karen Gilber states that as a nurse she

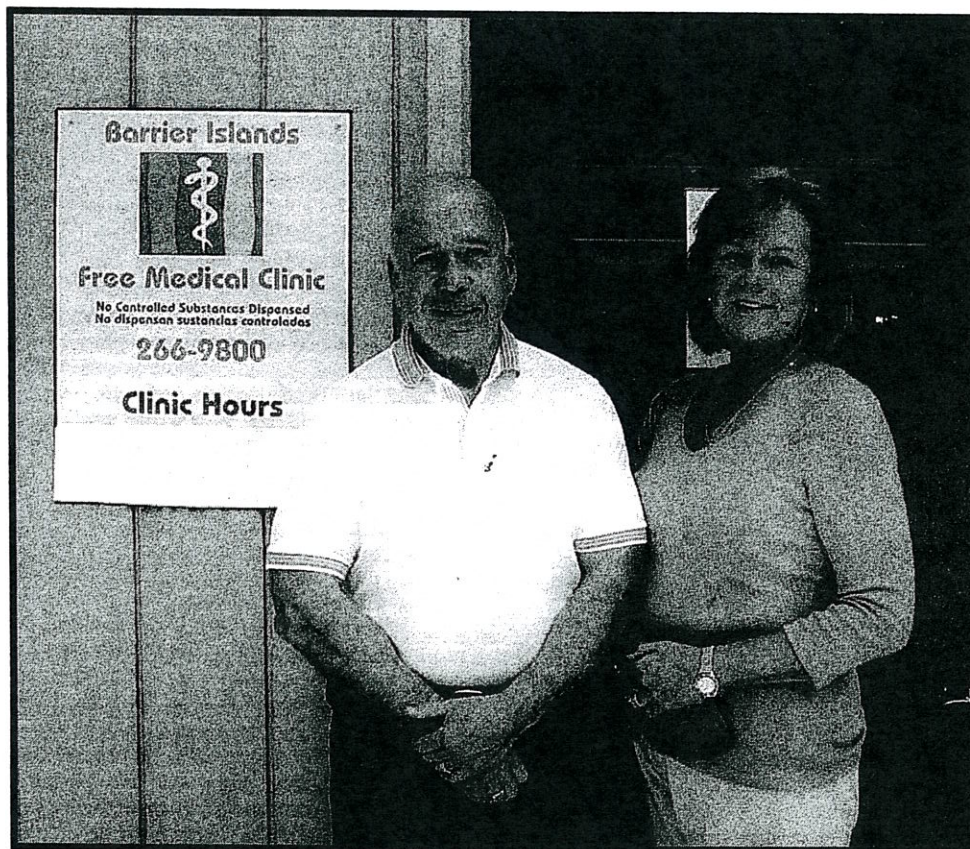
stresses the importance of education to these patients. Once diagnosed, they need to understand how to manage their conditions. She reviews educational materials with each patient and teaches them how use home testing kits. Karen feels it is so important to educate the mothers of families, so their children can avoid some of these same health issues.

The Giblers find the patients to be just like private practice. They do not lack motivation for their health care needs, they just lack available resources. Their patients have been very appreciative and mutual respect is formed between the medical staff and patients.

Both Karen and Sheridan stress the importance of the staff and non-medical volunteers. They could not accomplish what they do without the support team behind the front desk. Staff and volunteers verify the eligibility of the patients, maintain schedules and update charts. One critical volunteer group to all the health care providers are the Spanish interpreters. This is one area that more volunteers are always needed.

Dr. Spann, Medical Director of the BIFMC, states the Giblers, along with the other volunteers have been instrumental in helping the clinic grow. Their goal is to offer free medical care and to become a trusted place for the uninsured, primarily working poor. By providing volunteer-driven medical care, the clinic creates healthier workers and a healthier community.

Dr. Spann and the Giblers emphasize the importance of the working relationship with Roper St. Francis Hospital. All



lab work, diagnostic testing and many surgeries are performed there free of charge to eligible patients. Without this relationship, it would be impossible to provide complete patient care. Visits to the clinic reduce the use of emergency rooms for primary care. Patients going to an emergency room in SC for primary care cost on average \$2,048. The same patient being seen at the clinic costs on average \$69.86. This is according to the SC Office of Research and Statistics.

Dr. Spann feels it is a privilege

to be a part of such a successful clinic. "Everyone is happy because they want to be here" states Dr. Spann. He also feels blessed to have the support of the community in so many ways. In order to offer free medical care, fund raising is an important part of running the clinic. Volunteers help with this as well. Seabrook Island ladies golf and tennis just recently held a "Swing for Pink" tournament day for the benefit of breast cancer awareness and education. The proceeds were donated to the BIFMC to provide breast

cancer screening and education for their patients. The importance of these fundraisers is two fold according to Dr. Spann. It helps the clinic promote breast cancer education, but also aids in grant applications. Community support is a critical part of receiving grant monies. Dr. Spann and the Giblers expressed their gratitude for this support.

As the clinic continues to grow so will its need for volunteers. To learn more about volunteering contact them at 843-266-9800. Visit their web site at BIFMC.org.▲