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NEWS RELEASE

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MARQUETTE—A new clinic will soon open its doors to offer primary health care, dental and behavioral health services for residents of Marquette and Alger counties.

The new Marquette Alger Health Center, located at 700 W. Washington St. in downtown Marquette, will specialize in providing services to the uninsured and underinsured, and will also offer a convenient location for anyone with health insurance in need of care.

“The Marquette Alger Health Center is not just another doctor’s office. We’re a community health center. We serve everyone, regardless of insurance status. We specialize in providing care to people who might otherwise slip through the cracks.” said Sandy Wilson, board chairperson of the U.P. Association of Rural Health Services, Inc. (UPARHS). The association has organized and administered Federally Qualified Health Centers in the Upper Peninsula for over two decades.

The Marquette Alger Health Center will operate under the auspices of UPARHS as it works toward completing the process of becoming a Federally Qualified Health Center. As such it will be supported by government and community grants, co-payments from patients, insurance reimbursements from those who have health insurance, and donations. In the meantime, the clinic is being launched with UPARHS’s existing funds.

While there are hospitals and other health care options in the region, Gov. Jennifer Granholm recently applied for a federal exemption to include Marquette among those designated as Medically Underserved Populations; Alger County has received a similar designation as a Medically Underserved Area.

“When budget issues forced the health department to close its dental clinic at Sawyer, we stepped in to help. Based on what we’ve witnessed at the clinic in Sawyer, there are many, many people in the region who are in need of care, and not just dental

care,” said Joseph Zyble, communications manager for the U.P. Association of Rural Health Services, Inc. “The degradation of the economy in recent years is putting more of our residents at risk. Our board, which by federal guidelines consists of members who are patients at our health centers, recognized that there is a growing population of uninsured or underinsured people in this region who need health care services. The governor’s action supports this.”

“We all know relatives or friends who have lost their job and their health coverage; it’s frightening,” said Ed Bogart, a member of the UPARHS Board. “Our clinics can help these folks. They can get services on a sliding fee that’s based on family size and income. It’s not a free clinic, but the co-payments are minimal. It makes getting health services possible for just about anybody.”

Studies have demonstrated that at times even those with health insurance sometimes do not receive proper health treatment due to lack of convenient provider locations or other factors that limit access.

“This clinic is located on the main artery that runs through the center of Marquette; we’re in a very visible, accessible location for people. It will be great health care option for those who need the convenience,” Wilson said.

In accordance with guidelines for establishing Federally Qualified Health Centers, the new clinic will also be adding behavioral health services, a feature that can be especially important during economic downturns.

“Unemployment can lead to depression; it’s natural. And we know that people who suffer depression also tend to get sick easier and take longer to recover. We focus on taking care of the whole person and behavioral health services will be an important component of the clinic,” Zyble said.

Over the years, a number of studies have demonstrated the positive outcomes of community health centers. Some of these include:

- Greatly improved access to basic care and preventative services to vulnerable populations.
- Reduced patient care costs resulting in as much as \$24 billion in nationwide annual savings, which includes a \$6.7 billion in savings to the federal share of the Medicaid program.

- Reduced health disparities between groups based on socio-economic factors.
- Reduction of infant mortality rates by 10 percent, and lowered rates of low birth weight.
- Create economic growth in communities they serve by creating jobs. In 2008, Michigan community health centers had a positive economic income on the state of \$323,800,000.

“As a community health center we often serve those who would otherwise not get the care they need, but we’re here for anyone who needs care. We accept Medicaid, Medicare and most insurances. We look forward to collaborating with other health care organizations in Marquette and Alger counties to get everyone the health care they need,” Zyble said.

The Marquette Alger Health Center is owned and operated by the U.P. Association of Rural Health Services, Inc. The association also has clinics in Crystal Falls, Engadine, Ewen, Gwinn (Sawyer), Menominee and Spalding. More information will be forthcoming regarding the opening of the clinic. For more information about the U.P. Association of Rural Health Services visit www.upruralhealth.org.

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