

Free clinic treats 'silent disease'

(Submitted by Public Health Muskegon County)

The Hearing and Vision program at Public Health — Muskegon County offers follow-up specialty hearing clinics for children who do not pass the regular hearing screenings conducted at Muskegon County schools. The next clinic is planned for June 15 at the public health department and is provided at no cost to families, thanks to funding from the Michigan Department of Community Health.

"The clinics are helpful for those families who need a referral to a specialist but can't afford the co-pays or don't have insurance at all," notes public Health Technician Grace Park, who coordinates the clinics. "Without our clinics, many of these children might never get the help they need for their hearing problems. For some of them it can mean permanent hearing loss."

A local ear, nose and throat specialist physician, A. James Potter, M.D., offers his services at the clinics along with audiologist Susan Barnard, MA, CCA, from the Muskegon Hearing and Speech Center. Dr. Potter finds the clinics rewarding, too, and explains how hearing loss can be a silent disease.

"You can't always see it by looking at a child," said Dr. Potter. "Often nobody knows. Sometimes it is easily correctable, but if it's not recognized and corrected, you could miss a critical window of opportunity and it can affect the rest of a child's life. There's a critical period where, if you don't learn language, you won't be able to later. Hearing loss even impacts intelligence — and teachers can't be expected to pick that up every time."

Even parents can miss the signs. A mother of a kindergartner (Keara Johnson) who was seen at the March clinic says, "Now that I start putting things together, she's probably had trouble hearing all along. Her teachers can't figure out why she's such a sweet kid but she doesn't seem to understand much."

Dr. Potter examine Keara and recommended she be evaluated for surgery to correct the hearing loss. "When there's trouble learning to speak, we have to be more aggressive about it; if you're going to learn to talk, you have to be able to hear."

Other children seen at the March hearing specialty clinic included two who needed hearing aids, and after the clinic they received the necessary medical clearance to be fitted for new hearing aids. Some children received prescriptions for antibiotics to clear up infections, some got referrals for formal audiograms, and several were referred for follow-up for suspected sensorineural hearing loss.

Ms. Park suggests that if a parent is concerned about their child's hearing, a good first step is to get screened at Public Health — Muskegon County's free walk-in hearing clinic. That service is available on Fridays from 8 to 11 a.m. and 1 to 5 p.m. "If they don't pass the screening and it looks like more follow-up is needed, we will put them in the schedule to see Dr. Potter on June 15."

If you think your child may have a hearing problem, look for these signs:

- You have to repeat yourself several times before your child responds.
- Your child turns music or television up too loud.
- Your child seems to have pain in their ears, or tugs/rubs at their ears
- You notice your child consistently turns one side of their head toward you when you speak.
- Your child seems to be acquiring speech more slowly than others the same age.

Anyone with questions about hearing screening for children can contact Public Health — Muskegon County at (231) 724-1394. •

Armed Forces Day tribute scheduled

(Submitted by USS LST 393 Veterans Museum)

On Saturday, May 19, tours through the LST 393 and museum will be free beginning at 10 a.m. (Donations, however, are appreciated.) The Grand Rapids Accordion Ensemble will present a free patriotic concert.

The formal ceremony starts at noon with patriotic renderings by Gweneth Bean, Metropolitan Opera star, and Muskegon's Leffring Sisters. The keynote address will be presented by Dave Eling, Muskegon County's VA director. The "Missing Man's Table" ceremony will be narrated by Susan Harrison Wolffis. Also included in the tribute will be a demonstration on how to care for the American flag, and a special concert by the brass and percussion sections of the West Michigan Concert Winds. There will be a \$5 admission charge for the concert.

Purple Heart recipients and former POWs will be honored at the formal ceremony. Eligible veterans (or the family of a veteran) are encouraged to pre-register prior to the event so a certificate of appreciation may be prepared for each of them to be awarded at the ceremony. The ceremony will end with a 21-gun salute, taps, and a war bird fly-over by John Workman's flying team, The Hooligans. •

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