

Lawmaker's efforts turned dental clinic into reality

By Patricia Villers

DERBY — The late state Rep. Richard O. Belden of Shelton would not have wanted the kudos given to him Tuesday.

That was the consensus of all who knew Belden, who died in August. In his honor, the Hill Health Corp. Richard O. Belden Dental Clinic was dedicated in a program at Club Ballroom, attended by more than 100 people.

A tour of the new clinic, located in the same building as Training, Education and Manpower Inc. at 30 Elizabeth St., followed.

Lt. Gov. Michael Fedele said “this facility is important. Dick Belden saw a need in this community for (affordable dental services).” Fedele congratulated TEAM and Hill Health Corp. for what they had achieved.

“It was a long-fought battle, but you got it,” he said.

The state has contributed \$900,000 to the \$1.2 million project.

Belden was a Republican who represented Shelton in the General Assembly from 1975 until his death last year at age 73. He was called the “Dean of the House,” because he was the longest continuously serving member.

TEAM President and CEO Richard J. Knoll said Belden had worked hard to get funding to launch the clinic project. Belden had served on the 17-member Valley Dental Advisory Council with Knoll.

Among supporters of the project are the state Department of Social Services, Connecticut Health Foundation, Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, Griffin Hospital, United Healthcare, The Colgate Palmolive Foundation, American Honda Motor Co., Lower Naugatuck Valley Parent-Child Resource Center, Casey Family Services and Ronald McDonald House.

State Comptroller Nancy Wyman addressed Belden's widow, Bertha Belden. “Bert, we're glad they decided to name (the clinic) after Dick,” Wyman said. “Those of us who served with him knew what a gentleman and a scholar he was.”

Gary Spinner, Hill Health Corp. chief financial officer, said, “This is a remarkable accomplishment. Rich (Knoll) had a vision, and without the vision of TEAM we would not be here.”

Bertha Belden said, “I just want to thank you for naming the dental clinic after Dick,” adding he “was the talker of the family.”

Ronald Linden, a Shelton dentist and a member of the Valley Dental Coalition, said, "I feel like a baby has been born. It's not often that dreams come true. This facility will not only be a model for our state, but for our nation."

State Rep. Themis Klarides, R-Derby, said Belden was her mentor. "He'd be mortified that he was getting any recognition," she said. "Dick's legacy is not because he was a state representative, but why he was a state representative. He knew the need and he went at it with everything."

Shelton Mayor Mark A. Lauretti said, "Everybody understood Dick Belden the same way and the quality person he was." Lauretti said it was Belden who got him involved in public service. "When there was something on my mind, there was nobody better to talk to than Dick Belden. This is an emotional time for me, as it is for others here."

Patricia Villers can be reached at pvillers@nhregister.com