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## United Way grants to help Sangamon County's needy

BY PATRICK YEAGLE

Two grants announced Sept. 14 will help supply computers and medical care for Springfield citizens in need.

The United Way of Central Illinois gave the two grants totaling \$46,000 to Springfield-based charities Computer Banc and the Sangamon County Medical Society to support new programs at both organizations as part of the United Way's "Venture Funds" program.

"It really is a pleasure to help some fairly grassroots programs develop things that we know are making a difference," says John Kelker, president and CPO of United Way of Central Illinois.

Computer Banc, which refurbishes donated computers with educational software at little or no cost for schools, service agencies and academically at-risk children, received a \$29,500 grant to implement a new "Computers for Home" program. Springfield School District 186 and Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Illinois Capital Region will help Computer Banc identify children from low-income families who are eligible to receive refurbished computers. To qualify, kids must reside in the Springfield metropolitan area, qualify for the reduced-price school lunch program, maintain the same residence for one year and maintain attendance at the same public school for one year. David Fowler, Computer Banc's executive director, says the program will provide computers for 100 children from kindergarten through high school.

"Demographics of such youth indicate that the youth living in disadvantaged circumstances do not have access to computer technology, resulting obviously in decreased computer skills," Fowler says. "Funding cuts and staff reductions have also rendered many service agencies unable to provide technological services to the youth in Springfield. ... By placing refurbished computers with children and families that meet the grant guidelines, Computer Banc and its partners will provide a resource to help kids improve academically."

Tosha Cantrell-Bruce, a professor with the University of Illinois Springfield's Department of Public Administration Nonprofit Project, will collect data from the program to evaluate its effectiveness.

"We want to see how the presence of computers in low-income homes influences performance indicators," she says. "We've found some similar studies, but nothing quite like this, so we're excited to see how it turns out."

The remaining \$16,500 in grant money went to the Coordinated Access to Community Health (CATCH) program run by the Sangamon County Medical Society. The pilot program will provide free primary medical care for individuals in Sangamon County whose income does not exceed 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Under CATCH, local doctors will volunteer to provide program enrollees with a medical home, specialty care and help navigating the health care system.

"Individuals who don't have primary care are going to be seen in the emergency room, whether that's for an ear infection or a sore throat, things that are not really emergency needs," says Michele Tucker, CATCH program development director. "The benefit of having a primary care physician is that it's someone who can follow you along your journey to see what you've had before or any existing conditions you have. ... There is also a lack of specialty care (for low-income residents) – a cardiac surgeon, an orthopedic surgeon or whatever it may be. We're hoping that by coordinating with physicians here in town, we'll be able to get more timely access for individuals who are in need."

A panel of United Way volunteers choose the organization's venture grant recipients from proposals submitted by local charities and institutions, and the grants can only be used to pay for the submitted projects. The local United Way branch generally gives three or four grants each year, Kelker says, adding that the two most recent grants are the largest the local United Way has ever awarded.

For more information on Computer Banc, visit [www.computerbanc.org](http://www.computerbanc.org). For more information on CATCH, visit [www.scmsdocs.org](http://www.scmsdocs.org).

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