The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) was officially launched as a national community-based movement in July 2002. It was formed in response to a Presidential Call to Action to improve emergency services in our communities. The MRC is sponsored by the Office of the Surgeon General, in cooperation with the White House’s USA Freedom Corps, the Department of Homeland Security, and the National Cyber Corps. Volunteers with both medical and non-medical backgrounds who are willing to donate a little time can create big difference in our communities.

MRC volunteers can perform a pivotal role in the health and wellbeing of communities on the Treasure Coast during times of emergency, especially in the following areas:

- Public Health
- Education
- Security
- Non-profit capacity building efforts.

Runners from Allegany find the recognition and appreciation of the community. They provide invaluable resources with their thousands of service hours.

Our county is challenged by socio-economic factors, including children living in poverty and inadequate employment. We know that income and education levels have a strong influence on a community’s health. Our community is working on initiatives that address the root causes of poverty, and in creating a culture that supports children’s ability to succeed. We believe that these efforts will result in improved health. Our health department and community can take great pride in the continuous improvements we have made over the years, in spite of our challenges.

As your County Health Officer, I invite you to celebrate National Public Health Month with us. The theme for 2013 is Return on Investment (ROI). The return on investment that public health brings to St. Lucie is a source of pride. Public health reaches people wherever they live, work, and play. This year’s theme underscores the important role that public health plays in our economy. While return on investment remains a difficult concept for many people, we know that public health programs deliver a huge return on investment. In the long term, it generates more healthy outcomes over longer health care costs for years to come. Also, healthy children are more ready to learn and healthy workforces are more productive.

We are happy to share the good news that our county is getting healthier. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation reported that St. Lucie overall health among Florida’s 67 counties has improved from 30th in 2011 to 22nd in 2012. We made strides in reducing the premature (preventable) death rate in St. Lucie. This trend continues with improvements in smoking, hypertension, obesity, infections, and initiation of tobacco use. The entire report can be accessed at http://www.rwjf.org.

It often takes years to see a return on investment from public health services. A recent study examined the relationship between public health expenditures and preventable deaths over a 10-year period. The authors estimated that each dollar invested in public health programs in the first three years of life has a lifelong return of $10. The Healthy Start program, established in St. Lucie in 1995, was examined by a team of researchers from the University of Florida. They established the Healthy Start Risk Screen, a simple tool that identifies women at risk of having a “high-risk” birth in the first year of life. This tool is now 20 years old.

A recent study published on the return on investment of tobacco prevention programs. The study found that over a 10-year period, state tobacco prevention programs that include a media and school based campaign, a quit line, and policy efforts may be needed.

Since 2010, they awarded nearly $1.2 million in St. Lucie. These funds support community organizing, outreach, community awareness, and recognition and appreciation of the importance of volunteering. The Palm Beach Region of Allegany Franciscan Ministries has supported hands on activities in St. Lucie County for a number of years. They provided seed money for the Hands on 60th clinic, and increased support to local organizations annually.

The 35 member team of volunteers in St. Lucie logged over 500 hours of service during 2012. According to state documents, the total value of their services was calculated to be $18,597. Volunteers are anchors within the community and the networking opportunities for program offers. Participants are very proud to be part of a community wide emergency response team.

Larry Lee Wells has coordinated the Toys for Tots since 1995. It often takes years to see a return on investment from public health services. A recent study examined the relationship between public health expenditures and preventable deaths over a 10-year period. The authors estimated that each dollar invested in public health programs in the first three years of life has a lifelong return of $10. The Healthy Start program, established in St. Lucie in 1995, was examined by a team of researchers from the University of Florida. They established the Healthy Start Risk Screen, a simple tool that identifies women at risk of having a “high-risk” birth in the first year of life. This tool is now 20 years old.

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In 2013, the Health Access Network opened its doors to a new site located at 1925 SE Veterans Drive. The site services over 1,000 patients annually. The Health Access Network provides services to both children and adults and is one of the few HIV/AIDS or special needs agencies that provide comprehensive health care to children.

The network offers a broad range of services, including primary care, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and HIV/AIDS care. The network is especially proud of its work with children, providing services to children with special needs, including those with autism and Down syndrome.

The network is committed to providing high-quality care to all patients, regardless of their ability to pay. The network accepts a variety of insurance plans, and patients who are uninsured are eligible for sliding-scale fees. The network is also committed to providing care in a welcoming and supportive environment, with trained staff who are sensitive to the needs of patients from diverse backgrounds.

The network is dedicated to improving the health of the community, and it works to achieve this goal by partnering with other organizations and by participating in a variety of community events. The network is an active member of the St. Lucie County Health Care Coalition, and it participates in numerous community health fairs and events.

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