

WellMed 'town hall' celebrates its patients

By **STEVE STEINER**

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"How can we better serve you?" asked Robin McMillan. She's the senior marketing specialist with WellMed Healthcare and she was talking about the first "town hall" the Bartow and Lakeland practices were holding on Thursday, Aug. 31 at the Harmony Haven reception facility on U.S. 98. "The purpose of the town hall is to bring extra value to our patients, get their feedback," McMillan said.

In addition to this being the first town hall, the gathering was also an opportunity to make known this year is the 25th anniversary of WellMed, headquartered in San Antonio, Texas. That, plus it has had a presence in Polk County five years, added McMillan.

WellMed, she said, which was started by physicians and continues to do so, makes sure the doctors are kept up-to-date with training sessions two times per year. It also offers classes for its patients. Among the classes are those diagnosed as pre-diabetic.

"It's much easier to treat something on the front end rather than on the back end," she said.

Those are not the only services provided WellMed patients, the overwhelming majority senior citizens. Another service is Comfort Care

Transportation, which provides senior citizens who do not have access to public transportation or do not drive.

"They recognize the most important thing for these patients is to see their doctor," said Michael Antonelli, who heads up this area's Comfort Care Transportation division. "You see the benefits of it." Without this service, he added, many would possibly end up having to go the emergency rooms of hospitals.

The event kicked off with an introduction by Rosemary Hernandez, regional manager, clinical operations, who welcomed everyone present and led off a round of introductions of the doctors and staff of the Bartow and Lakeland facilities.

Among the services provided patients, said Michael Strickland, with Lakeland, is being there,

no matter time or day.

"If you need to see us, call us," he said. "We'll make a home for you."

The town hall also provided patients the opportunity to tell their tales, with the first person, Fred McNair, a patient of Dr. Alicia Saunders of the Bartow facility. Saunders, he said, literally saved his life. In his testimonial he announced he had a heart transplant and it was now 18 months since that procedure.

McNair's wife, Edna, also patient of Saunders, spoke highly of her and the doctor's compassion toward Edna's mother.

"Dr. Saunders was like a friend to the family," Edna McNair said, adding that when it was her mother's time to let go, the doctor helped prepare the family. "I love Dr. Saunders. I always will. She's a wonderful person."



PHOTO BY STEVE STEINER

Fred McNair (center) tells how through Dr. Alicia Saunders (with the Bartow WellMed practice) saved his life.

