

> It takes a community... partnership

by Michael Woo



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When the doors open for the 5th Annual Health and Wellness Fair on Saturday, Sept. 15 at Oakland's Eastmont Town Center (ETC), more than 1,000 people will discover nearly 70 Bay Area health and wellness providers standing ready to offer free services. Families, children, seniors – all are welcome to partake in the health and medical screenings, which include dental, vision, blood pressure, HIV/AIDS testing, child immunizations, senior health, smoking cessation, asthma, and much more.

This free-to-the-public Health Fair, focused towards underserved and underinsured populations, is the result of a unique community partnership. Oakland-based Ramsell Corporation and its subsidiary, The Apothecary, the Alameda County Public Health Department, Assemblymember Sandré R. Swanson and the Center for Elders' Independence (CEI), have joined together to do what none of them could have accomplished on their own.

"For nearly 50 years, Ramsell Corporation has been creating positive outcomes for the health and safety of underserved populations," stated Eric Flowers, chief executive officer of Ramsell. "The Apothecary has held a Health Fair in East Oakland for the past four years. This year we wanted to attract a far larger audience to take advantage of all the free health services, but to do so, we needed to find partners."

As it turned out, the Alameda County Public Health Department and Assemblymember Swanson's office had both held health fairs in the past, and the Centers for Elders' Independence, a nonprofit health support organization for seniors, was hoping to hold a smaller health fair focused on seniors. Fortunately, when these organizations began to share their hopes and challenges, the opportunity for a health fair that would reach a broader audience began to take shape.

"This unique partnership is a perfect example of what can happen when concerned community-focused organizations see a common goal," commented Assemblymember Swanson. "Combining the abilities of these diverse for-profit, nonprofit and governmental organizations means that far more Oakland and East Bay residents will benefit from the services provided at the Health Fair."

There is a growing trend across the country for such cross-sector partnerships – partnerships combining two or more partners from the nonprofit, for-profit, education and government sectors – to address societal challenges. Especially in these economic times, such partnerships are able to highly leverage multiple assets (financial, experience, personnel, locations, technology, etc.) and achieve far greater results than any one or two organizations would achieve by themselves.

Angela Ball, director of public health nursing for the Alameda County Public Health Department, concluded, "Though the Health Fair is just one day, it will have a lasting effect on underserved and underinsured residents." ■

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