

# As health care benefit, Duck Derby fills the bill

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Talk about getting your ducks in a row. Thousands of little yellow rubber duckies were once again dumped into the Indian River Lagoon last Sunday afternoon for a race to the sandy shores of the Captain Hiram's Sand Bar in the fourth annual Great Duck Derby to benefit Treasure Coast Community Health.

One-hundred percent of each \$5 duck "adoption" was being funneled back into the community in the form of expanded patient services. TCCH provides affordable medical and dental care to thousands of patients each year, many the working poor living at or below the poverty line who don't qualify for insurance.

"We started the day at about 2,100 ducks, and we'll continue selling them until about a half hour before they're released," said Paulette Heid, TCCH communication director. "We're only selling 5,000; same as last year."

Staff members and their families were doing a brisk business selling duck adoptions, 50/50 raffle tickets and all variety of duck-themed paraphernalia. "We're all ducked out," said Heid.

Unlike the rose-adorned chapeaux favored at the "other" Derby, the hats on this Derby Day featured duck bills and fluffy yellow tails. There were also T-shirts, duck necklaces and sunglasses, and even yellow duck callers – the "quackers" later used prodigiously as encouragement for the ducks' mad dash to the shore.

It couldn't have been a more perfect day. A lovely breeze off the water kept temperatures moderate and, once they were released from the Sea Tow, helped to push the little racers in. Once the winners were determined (with cash prizes to the first three), excited children helped gather the remainders, scooping them into laundry baskets to be put away for another year.

"It's really a fun day for us all," said TCCH CEO Vicki Soulé.

Treasure Coast Community Health will be expanding its operation this summer, so funding from the



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Duck Derby will quickly be put to use. TCCH operates two facilities in Fellsmere (one medical and one medical/dental), a Central Vero medical facility and a South Vero medical/dental facility.

“We are quite busy. We’re booked out two or three weeks in advance,” said Dr. John Kestranek, a dentist at the Fellsmere facility. “There’s a demand for quality dental care at an affordable price. We are busy and growing. It’s reflective of the need that the community has for us. The patients are really grateful; that makes all the difference.”

He added that in May and June they will offer complimentary oral cancer screenings – no appointment needed. “Our oral surgeon, Dr. Richard Carlin spearheaded that at both facilities,” said Kestranek.

By late summer they plan to open a dental office across the street from St. Helen’s Catholic Church, and to expand the pediatric and adult medical practice into Sebastian.

“Accessibility is really important, so we try to stay ahead in the planning,” said Soulé.