Denise Mahal calls it a “hidden treasure.” She’s the Vice President for Development of the Community Volunteers in Medicine (CVIM). Dr. Mary Wirship, its Vice President of Medical Affairs, calls it the place to “do the most good.” And Maureen Tomoshuk, its President and CEO, laments the many “who cannot afford to be sick.”

Based in West Chester, CVIM provides free medical and dental services to the poor and uninsured of Chester County—the low-income workers who would otherwise “fall through the cracks”—those who are below 300 percent of the federal poverty level. Funded entirely through philanthropy, CVIM served over 3,000 patients last year, conducted more than 30,000 patient visits, delivered over $5 million in services, and distributed more than $3 million in medications through its on-site dispensary.

Volunteers led classes and workshops in diabetes management, smoking cessation, nutrition and other topics. And these volunteers facilitate access to food cupboards, shelters, financial assistance, domestic violence, substance abuse programs and the like, thus heading off potential medical problems.

Begun in 1996, CVIM is busy and getting busier. About 60 staff members are working on any given day. Not surprisingly, demand for services grew greatly during the recession. It’s not yet known whether the need for services will begin to abate this year. And with the reputation of the group’s services growing, that may not happen anytime soon.

The staff consists of about 350 active volunteers, working along with about 15 full-time and 15 part-time paid staff. Staff includes clinical and professional support staff, nurses, doctors, hygienists, pharmacy workers, laboratory, clerical workers and translators (over half of their patients are Hispanic).

Medical specialties—24 in all—are covered by retired and part-time physicians. Interns from Temple University, University of Pennsylvania and Thomas Jefferson University, as well as nursing students from Villanova and Immaculata, also deliver services there. Local hospitals—particularly Chester County Hospital and Paoli Hospital—work closely with CVIM, referring patients who cannot be served, and furnishing the specialized care that can’t be provided.

All this activity takes place in a modern building by the West Chester airport, near public transportation and with plenty of parking. Recently expanded to 10,000 square feet, the space houses ten medical and six dental exam rooms, a laboratory, a classroom, administrative offices and large waiting room. It’s very clean and orderly, giving the impression of a well-run office.

CVIM serves a vital need in Chester County, providing medical and dental care to those who most need it, reducing the load on emergency rooms at the region’s hospitals. For that reason, we have selected the group as our Local Hero.

For more information or to volunteer, contact Denise D. Mahal, VP of Development. CVIM is always looking for volunteers especially: bilingual medical interpreter, dieticians, pharmacists, nurses, gastroenterologists, gynecologists, physical therapists, general dentists, dental hygienists and periodontists. Community Volunteers in Medicine, 300 B Lawrence Dr., West Chester. 610-836-599; CVIM.org.