

## SNAPSHOT

# Trying to make a big difference in the health care industry

By Terry Higgins

A vicious winter storm may have closed the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center for a day in November, but that didn't mean John Bartkowski got to take the day off.

In between battling the flu and reviewing a federal grant application due in Washington, D.C., later that week, the chief executive officer of the Milwaukee health facility, 1032 S. 16th St., found himself fulfilling the clinic's mission in a particularly strenuous manner.

"There are a lot of older people living around here who couldn't possibly handle something like this," said Bartkowski, who spent the better part of an evening and the next morning shoveling wet, heavy snow in the clinic's near south side neighborhood where he and his family live.

Shoveling snow may not fit the traditional role of health care, but it's all part of the job for the head of the 25-year-old center.

Not only did it log more than 50,000 patient encounters in 1994, it also made available social services, health education programs and preventive care in four

### John Bartkowski

**Position:** Chief executive officer of the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center

**Age:** 42

**Family:** Wife, Eloisa Gomez; son, Juan Carlos, 4

**Hobbies:** Studying flamenco guitar, training in martial arts (aikido and tai chi)

**Preferred way to beat the flu:**  
Take a nap



languages.

Most of its clients, which are approximately 70 percent Hispanic and 12 percent Hmong or Laotian, are either uninsured or covered by Medicaid.

The clinic charges fees based on the ability of patients to pay. It is supported by funds from the state and federal governments, grants and private donations.

A member of the center's board of directors since 1982, Bartkowski took over as executive director in 1990. With bachelor and master degrees in nurs-

ing and experience in hospital administration, he saw the chance to not only help his neighbors, but set an example for the rest of the country.

"A community health clinic should make a difference," he said. "It shouldn't be a revolving door that just refers clients somewhere else.

"As a clinic that came up from this community, we have an obligation to remember our mission and not try and become something we're not."

One effort that showed how

much impact the clinic can have on the community was a recently completed study of lead poisoning on the near south side of Milwaukee.

Health center outreach workers went door to door in a 16-block area bounded by West Scott Street, West National Avenue and South 12th and South 16th streets.

They found that nearly every house they visited contained higher-than-average lead poisoning risk factors.

Outreach workers also found that 41 of 102 children tested had elevated blood lead levels, a far higher percentage than indicated by traditional screening methods that rely on a physician's test.

The health center and the city of Milwaukee Health Department will follow up with affected families to provide education and assistance.

Efforts such as these have gained the attention of federal officials and earned the center praise from the U.S. Surgeon General's office and Donna Shalala, secretary of federal Department of Health and Human Services.

Joseph Czarnecki, the recently

appointed acting city of Milwaukee Health Commissioner, said the center's progressive reputation earned during Bartkowski's tenure was well deserved.

"Changes are taking place at the county, state and federal level that will affect a number of people who live in the city and need health care services," he said. "While we're still in a state of flux, I feel confident that centers such as Sixteenth Street will play an even greater role in the next decade."

Bartkowski will have plenty of chances to continue to spread the word about this and other center successes in 1996. In addition to serving on the board of directors of the National Association of Community Health Centers, he will also be president of the Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association.

In both positions he will be promoting the role of the community health center in providing public health services and education.

"The national spotlight is starting to shine on Wisconsin because of the changes taking place in delivering primary care in the public sector," he said.