

Health care for small biz

Beep announces company will put up 850G for plan

By ERIN GALLAGHER
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Employees of small businesses in northern Brooklyn will soon be able to get affordable health insurance through the new Brooklyn HealthWorks plan launched yesterday.

Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden announced an \$850,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to support the North Brooklyn Health Consortium's affordable insurance plan.

It will provide businesses that have fewer than 50 employees with affordable insurance rates.

"The lack of affordable health care is one of the most significant problems that Brooklynites face," Golden said. "We have to fight for everything we get in Brooklyn, and this was sorely needed."

Golden said uninsured families and individuals comprise 29% of borough residents.

The plan will be available to small businesses in Fort Greene, Crown Heights, Bushwick, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Williamsburg, Greenpoint, Ocean Hill-Brownsville and East New York.

To be eligible, the employee's annual family income must be between \$25,000 and \$35,000, making those qualifying for government assistance programs not eligible, said Nancy Gaeta, representing Program Planners, a consulting firm.

The benefit package includes inpatient care, preventative services and prescription drugs, along with a separate pharmaceutical plan that will provide discounted drugs.

Although exact rates are not yet set, planners expect the monthly family premium to be less than \$300 and the individual premium to be less than \$150. Officials expect most of those costs will be paid by employers.

Group Health Insurance will provide

administrative support by paying claims and answering questions, said Donna Lynne, executive vice president of the company.

"We're committed to the community and our mission is to provide affordable health care," she said.

The project has been in the works since 1999. It is one of 14 community-based initiatives nationwide that received funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Communities in Charge Program last year.

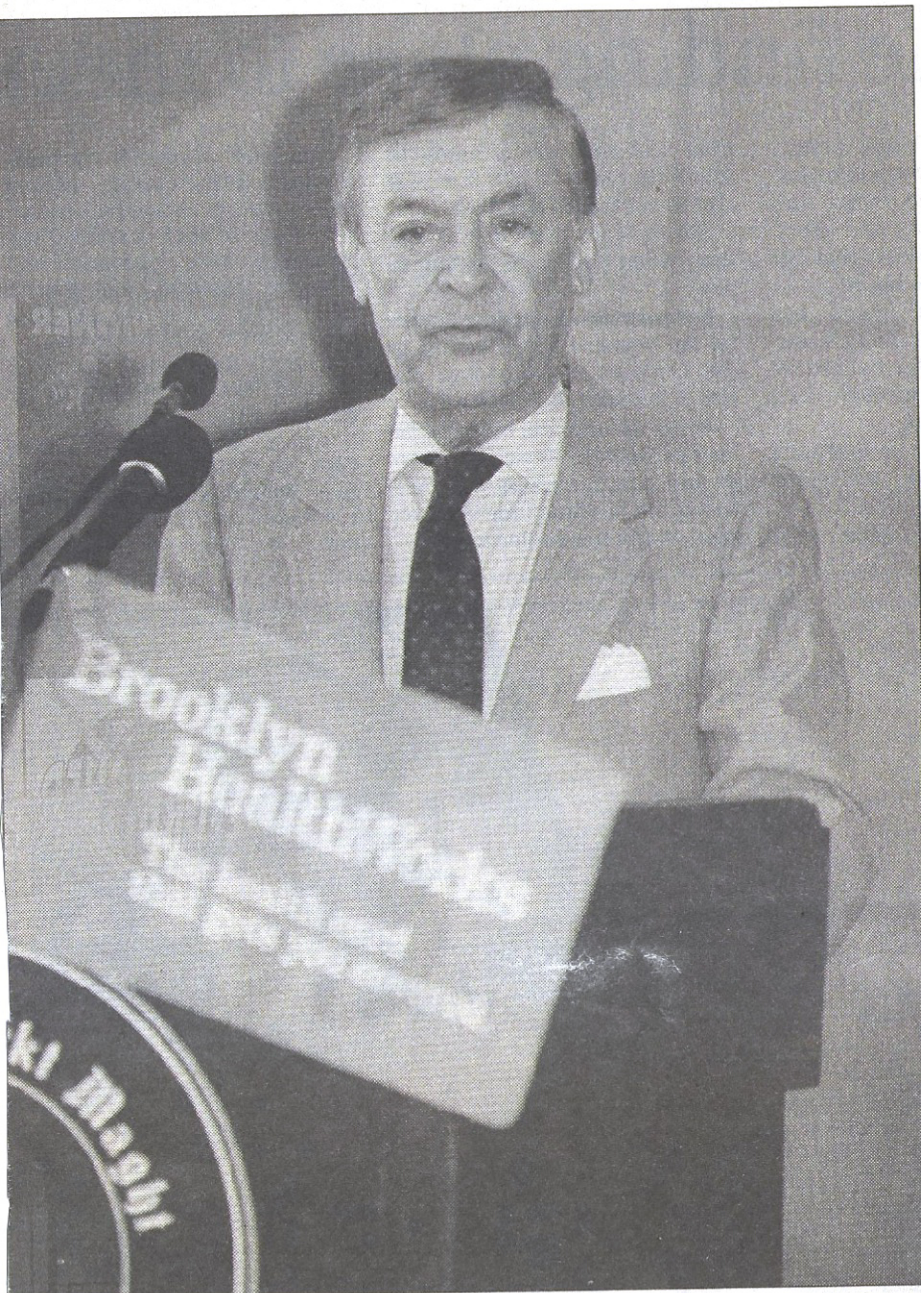
Brooklyn HealthWorks is seeking approval from the state Insurance Department, and Gaeta said they expect the okay as early as the middle of next month.

The consortium also has received \$900,000 from the Federal Health and Human Services Department, and \$50,000 each from the United Hospital Fund and the New York Community Trust.

A host of hospitals are on board, and some providers said participating in the program will allow them to focus more on the care they give.

"Forty percent of the people we see are uninsured," said Catherine Abate, president and CEO of the Community Health-Care Network. "Compensation [for this] will allow us to see more patients and provide even better care."

Brooklyn's Chamber of Commerce is working with the consortium to market the program to small businesses. Tony Lacitignola, the chamber's vice president of marketing, said the initiative illustrates what Brooklyn has always stood for.



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THEY'RE COVERED Borough President Howard Golden announces health insurance plan yesterday at Borough Hall. Plan will benefit employees of small businesses.