



CINDY BUTLER FOCKE

Winston Whitehurst, second from left, and Tim McCarthy, right, of the South Hampton Roads chapter of Virginia Organizing, presented certificates to, from left, Pat Davidson, Ellen Burgess and Dr. Heidi Kulberg of the Virginia Beach Department of Public Health.

## Health dept. cited for helping residents sign up for Obamacare

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### LYNNHAVEN

Dr. Heidi Kulberg and the Virginia Beach Department of Public Health were recognized June 2 for outstanding efforts helping residents sign up for health insurance under the Affordable Care Act.

Virginia Organizing is a nonpartisan grassroots organization dedicated to bringing people together to address issues that affect the quality of their lives.

"We are in deep gratitude to the three of you," Tim McCarthy told Kulberg, Pat Davidson and Ellen Burgess as they were given certificates of appreciation. "We are here to lift up and recognize this collaboration and leadership that's been provided by the Virginia Beach health department."

McCarthy, of Kings Grant, is co-chair of a health care issues team for Virginia Organizing's South Hampton Roads chapter. There were minimal outreach funds to help spread the word locally about the six-month open enrollment period that began in October.

"The health department became a primary ally to address the matter of enrolling people," McCarthy said. Virginia Organizing recruited volunteers who were trained by

### want to help?

Volunteer Certified Application Counselors are needed. Contact Pat Davidson at pat.davidson@vdh.virginia.gov.

### vigil tonight

Virginia Organizing will host a candlelight vigil tonight at 8 at the fountain plaza at Town Center. It's one of 10 vigils in Virginia to raise awareness about the need for Medicaid expansion.

the health department's civilian volunteer Virginia Beach Medical Reserves Corp.

Public information sessions at several Beach libraries were open to Hampton Roads residents. Those without email addresses, a requirement for the application, were assisted with the process. Messages left on a telephone hotline were returned and appointments were made for one-on-one assistance utilizing the central library's Internet-accessible computers.

McCarthy's wife Renee, a former local bookstore owner for 17 years, is a trained application counselor, and volunteered more than 150 hours helping others sign up for health care. The experi-

ence was rewarding, she said.

"Some have never had insurance, and they are grateful." One woman with a brain tumor was slowly depleting inheritance money left from her mother. Her \$1,600 monthly insurance expense was reduced to \$160. "She was happy," McCarthy said.

Kulberg, the health department's director, thanked her staff, other city departments and volunteers for their support. Access to care is crucial, she said. "Our mission is to educate, inform and empower," she said. "This is an obvious extension of that."

More than 216,000 Virginians enrolled for insurance with the Affordable Care Act. Virginia Organizing spokesperson Amanda Pohl said more than 500 area residents signed up during the open enrollment period. Many would have been left out if not for efforts of the Virginia Beach health department, she said.

"Virginia Organizing recognizes the importance of this model and hopes to replicate it across the state."

For more information on Virginia Organizing, visit, [www.Virginia-Organizing.org](http://www.Virginia-Organizing.org).

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