

OU joins consortium to save health costs

Public universities in Michigan are coming together to look for alternatives to curb excessive increases in the cost of health care benefit plans and services. Hence, the Michigan Universities Coalition on Health (MUHC), a value-based purchasing coalition, was formed in an effort to bring down the costs associated with health care which limit the ability to contain cost increases.

Oakland University has joined this state-wide initiative, along with 12 other public universities in Michigan.

Diana Decker has been elected to the Board of the Michigan Universities Coalition on Health, and Nancy Vander Werff has been designated as the alternative representative from Oakland.

"The mission of the new coalition is to improve the value of health care benefit plans and services through better quality and lower costs for the Michigan public universities, their employees, students, retirees, and dependents," Decker said.

The formation of the health purchasing coalition will give OU access to networks of information and opportunities to limit the negative effects of health care cost increases.

"MUCH will participate with 10 local coalitions already established in Michigan as well as many more that participate in the National Business Coalition on Health," Decker said.

These coalitions have already been involved with producing health care benchmark studies that analyze health care access, quality and cost, and some members of the new coalition are already participating in local coalition activities with remarkable results.

The public universities have already had preliminary meetings with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan to begin mapping strategies with the dominant health insurance company in Michigan.

Coalition members will also be working with health insurance plans, hospitals, physicians and other providers of care to improve access, cost and quality at the local level.

These universities represent one of the largest employer groups in Michigan. As a coalition, these 13 universities expect to play an important role in planning about market-driven health care reform by holding the health care delivery system accountable for the value of health care in communities throughout Michigan.

OCC develops 5-year learning growth plan

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

From the ground up. Or, more precisely, from the student up.

That's how Oakland Community College will put together its learning technology program over the next five years.

"Last time around, we were a budget-driven institution. Now we're a planning institution. We'll start with the student," said OCC Chancellor Richard T. Thompson as the board on Dec. 15 approved, 6-1, a professional services agreement.

"Tonight we're talking about intellectual services," the chancellor said of the \$9.7 million (tops) deal with SCT Software & Resource Management Corp. of Malvern, Pa.

"Over five years, we'll purchase a software system, a hard drive and PCs (personal computers)," Thompson said. He estimated OCC will need to spend \$8 million to \$10 million a year out of its \$120 million budget to keep "technologically afloat."

"That's an industry standard — 5 to 8 percent of budget," he said.

The SCT pact is for advice only — teaching faculty, building plans to revamp the curriculum, setting up a "student technology assistant support program," designing solutions and so on.

Student needs will come first; then faculty; then staff and administration.

A major job for SCT will be to assess the current skill of the college staff and analyze what

future skills will be required, according to the contract outline.

Ruth Grass, a counselor who chairs the OCC Academic Senate, said that group endorsed the college's progress so far and is "looking forward" to the new programs.

Thompson said it was better to hire SCT for a five-year consulting job than to add staff who, at the end, "wouldn't fit into the system." The contract calls for six full-time top SCT people on OCC's five campuses and central office.

"I find this expensive for consulting," said board chair Judith Wisner of West Bloomfield. She calculated fees that amounted to \$100,000 annual salaries for eight months work.

"I agree with the principle, but I don't like the five-year plan, and I don't like the idea, I couldn't get the information I wanted," she said as she cast the lone dissenting vote.

Attorney Kathryn Ossian, of the college's law firm of Miller Canfield, said the contract was designed to prevent litigation. "I have litigated computer contracts," she said.

Ossian said that if the agreement yields new developments, they will be jointly owned by SCT and OCC, and the college must recoup its development costs.

The contract may be terminated during the first three years, but the college would have to pay the total three-year cost of \$6.7 million. Wisner noted, however, that OCC would have paid the biggest bulk of the cost by that point.

OAKLAND DIGEST

Oakland Digest provides a summary of headline stories from around the county during the week leading up to Dec. 18.

BLOOMFIELD HILLS
Crowley's tenant undecided: Rumors abound about a possible tenant for the vacant Crowley's building on Old Woodward Avenue. Several big names have been mentioned, but a spokesman for the developer has thus far declined to comment.

CLARKSTON
Zoning variance approved: The Clarkston Zoning board of Appeals has approved a use-variance permit to allow a four-unit condominium project to be built on Main Street. Some officials are concerned the variance — allowing condos on property zoned for single family residence — will set a precedent for future developers.

FARMINGTON HILLS
Sting nabs nine: Using a 17-year-old decoy, police checked 54 establishments with Class C liquor licenses for illegal sales. Nine offenders were ticketed with the violations referred to the Michigan Liquor Control Commission. The sting is an annual event to curb under-aged drinking, according to police chief William Dwyer.

LAKE ORION
GM abatement pending: Orion Township officials have postponed a decision on a tax abatement for a \$140 million of the General Motors Assembly plant until its Feb. 17 meeting. Trustee JoAnn Van Tassel said new jobs are an important consideration.

OXFORD
Community rallies to help youngster: Area residents are mustering resources to help Garik Martinez Bowker, the 6-year-old Oxford Elementary School student hospitalized after being stuck by a pick-up truck Wednesday on M-24 at Lincoln.

The youngster and his family need emotional and financial support, according to Laura Schlicht, whose son Robert is one of Garik's friends.

ROCHESTER HILLS
Residents might prefer Rochester: Homeowners in the Stoney Creek Historic District of Rochester Hills have contacted state lawmakers about the possibility of being annexed to the City of Rochester. Among other concerns, residents say the 40-mile per hour speed limit along Tiencin Road is too fast for a residential area. State law does not seem to offer much hope.

SOUTHFIELD
Montgomery Ward closing: Managers at the Northland Center expressed confidence they can find a new tenant for the Montgomery Ward store that will be vacant next year. The 3-year-old store, with 125,200 square feet, is being closed as part of the parent company's nationwide restructuring.

TROY
Bank suspect arrested: A preliminary examination for a 46-year-old Troy man charged in the robbery of a Bloomfield Township bank was scheduled for Dec. 23 in 48th District Court. The man, Michael Witoszynski, is accused in the Dec. 10 robbery. The heist was foiled when an explosive dye device hidden in the stolen money went off after in his car.

WEST BLOOMFIELD
Hepatitis A suit pending: An Oakland County circuit judge has ordered that any victims of last fall's Hepatitis A outbreak can join in the suit pending in his court against the Stago & Co. deli, identified as the source of the infection that affected more than 40 people. In the meantime, the deli's owner, Steven Goldberg, said business is fine.

—Compiled by staff writer Pat Murphy

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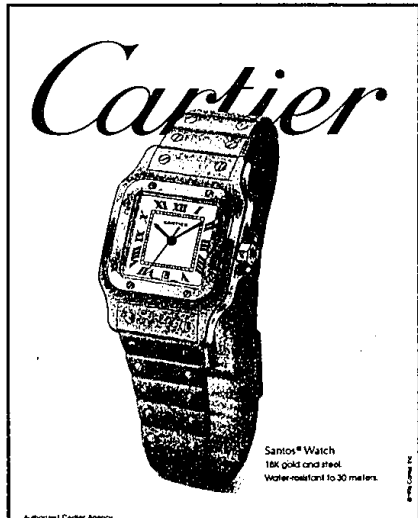
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