

CHAT ROOM



Katie McManus

A positive attitude fills up her glass

Call me the eternal optimist but there is still a lot of goodness and good people left in the world today.

I had a conversation with my coworkers the other day and they expressed some serious disappointment in our society. I'm not naive. This world definitely has its share of problems but why can't we focus more on our achievements rather than our downfalls. I proceeded to give my coworkers a list of examples of recently accomplished good deeds: the tragedy in Honduras. People from all over the country pulled together to offer aid to those in need. Just recently when temperatures were below freezing many Detroiters opened their doors to the homeless. Not to mention the outpouring of support from the community for the family of the six children just recently killed in a house fire.

I had my own experience with a Good Samaritan a few years back when I had car trouble. I was coming home from work in my old beat up Dodge Dart and my tire blew. I was on a very busy part of Eight Mile Road and had never changed a flat tire before. As I got out of the car a man pulled over and asked me if I needed help. I graciously accepted his assistance. This man proceeded to

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The doctor's still in, 30 years later

■ The independent family doctor's a rarity. But not in Farmington, thanks to Dr. Eliezer Monge.

BY DIANE GALE ANDREASSI
SPECIAL WRITER



When Dr. Eliezer Monge came to the United States he planned to stay for the one year it would take to complete an internship at Wayne County General Hospital.

Then one year later he agreed to take on a medical practice in downtown Farmington. Again, the plan was that he would try it for one year.

Thirty-five years later, sitting in his Farmington Road office of 30 years, Monge explained that he had every intention of returning to his native Puerto Rico some three decades ago.

Earlier this month, Monge was named chief of staff at St. Mary Hospital in Livonia. Beyond the longevity of his practice, Monge also represents a shrinking number of doctors who are side stepping the popular trend of joining large corporate practices and particularly avoiding Health Maintenance Organizations.

The days of visiting an independent family doctor in a fee for service downtown storefront office like the one Monge has nurtured over the years sounds a lot like quaint scenes of frontier life on the television show, "Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman."

Only, Monge's life is real and so is the homespun loyalty and commitment that he and his patients share. Some of his patients are the original people he saw in 1968 when he took over the practice from Dr. Joseph Gadbaw, who was at the same location 22 years earlier.

For instance, Elaine Walker wouldn't think about going anywhere else. The 70-year-old Brighton woman has been with Monge for the entire 30 years he



Checking up: Dr. Eliezer Monge takes Barbara Westfall's blood pressure recently at his office in Farmington.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRESLER

has been practicing on Farmington Road. When she lived on Nine Mile and Grand River, Monge was her neighborhood doctor. And when she moved to Brighton, he remained her doctor. Her daughter, husband and son-in-law are patients, too.

"He's a marvelous, marvelous doctor," she gushed. "In fact they're all marvelous, the whole staff and the doctor."

Monge also applauded his staff - Colleen Hynes, a 15-year employee, Mary Lou Schiffman a 10-year employee and Denise Vargas, a four-year employee - for making the practice successful. The key is to make patients feel special, said Monge, who practices general internal medicine with a specialty in gastroenterology.

"The main thing is that you have to show patients that you really care for

them and that you're interested in their well-being," Monge said. "You can't treat them like a number. One of the most rewarding things is to take care of patients who are ill and make them feel better and prolong their lives in a significant way."

He stresses, however, that he has been able to provide a caring atmosphere that puts the patient first, because he avoided HMOs.

"The HMOs are trying to take over," Monge said. "I don't think HMOs are compatible with medicine. Those are mainly for profit. They're not working for the care of the patient. I'd rather do indigent work for some patients than to take HMOs. Once you become affiliated with those companies, they will dictate the patients' needs. I'd rather do what is best for the patient than what the HMO thinks is best for the patient. I've been lucky. I haven't needed to take HMOs - my patients have been faithful," said Monge, who accepts Blue Cross and some PPOs.

In fact, he said, HMOs go against the essence of what Monge believes is the heartbeat of a medical practice. Thousands of people have come to his office through the years. Longtime residents have seen businesses come and go while Monge has become a mainstay business operator who hasn't pursued greener Main Streets or major thoroughfares that might attract more patients.

And like every doctor, Monge has a list of patients who remain an indelible memory, including one indigent man who was suffering from liver disease and was terminal. Monge and his staff took care of him for six months, which was just long enough for a liver transplant.

Monge quickly recalls another patient, a 23-year-old woman who had a malignant polyp removed that likely saved her life.

Beyond the different faces that Monge has seen, the one thing that has changed the most during the three decades of his practice is "the intrusion of government in the field of medicine

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