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 Arts  
 Sports  
 Commentary  
 Letters  
 Legals  
 Obituaries  
 Fiction  
 Listings & Events  
 Movies  
 Blogs  
 Local History  
 Real Estate Listings  
 East Hampton Weather  
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 Media Kit

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The East Hampton Star

153 Main Street

East Hampton, NY 11937

[To Your Health](#)

## A Healing Organization

By James N. Dillard, M.D.

(02/25/2010) Frank is a big guy with an easy grin. He was raised in East Hampton off Route 114 and works in Wainscott. When he was 42, the doctor told him he had diabetes. He was okay for a while, but then it got worse. Frank had to start injecting insulin every day. The diabetes began affecting his vision and numbed his feet. It got harder for him to walk and to see well enough to do his work.

After his wife died in 2006, it was tough for Frank to do the injections every day. His vision got so bad he had to stop working. A few weeks later, he wound up in the hospital emergency department with his blood sugar out of control.

The doctors got the sugar back down and corrected some other blood problems. They discharged Frank with prescriptions for insulin and needles to keep his diabetes under control, but he hadn't been working, so he didn't have the money to fill the prescriptions.

With nowhere else to find help, he tried the medical offices at Pantigo Place in East Hampton, behind Luigi's on Montauk Highway. That's where he met Sheila Rogers. Ms. Rogers is the director of the East Hampton Healthcare Foundation. She looked at Frank's prescriptions and listened to his story.

There wasn't much that could be done. Frank was going to go home to the same situation that led him to the hospital in the first place. Ms. Rogers wrote down all of his information, and then she walked with him down the hall to the pharmacy. She pulled out her own credit card and bought him a month's supply of needles and insulin. The pharmacist showed Frank an easier way to do the injections by himself.

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That Sunday, the board of the foundation had its regular meeting. Ms. Rogers told them the story. They were struck by her generosity, but she argued that the foundation should start a program to fund prescriptions for people like Frank who are in a tough spot. Since then, the East Hampton Healthcare Foundation has provided over \$25,000 in emergency prescriptions for local residents who could not afford to buy them.

Many people don't know it, but the Healthcare Foundation has been a quiet force in our community for over a decade. It started back in 1998, when the East Hampton Village Preservation Society did a quality-of-life survey. They found a serious lack of health care providers in the Town of East Hampton. People would go west because there were so few doctors here.

Ms. Rogers knew Henry L. Murray from her work in the capital campaign for the East Hampton Library. Mr. Murray, who now serves as the chairman of the foundation's board, asked Ms. Rogers to help him with fund raising for a health care initiative.

The foundation was created as a not-for-profit and was able to raise an initial \$4 million. It bought the current property at 200 Pantigo Place. Dr. Gail Schonfeld and Dr. Michael Israel had been practicing in a small building that was slated to become a funeral home, so a larger professional space was built to attract new physicians.

The Healthcare Foundation decided to partially subsidize physicians in getting started here by offering them rental space at below-market rates, and to provide medical care to the underserved in the community. The medical building has services affiliated with Southampton Hospital, including a state-of-the-art radiology suite with bone densitometry, digital X-ray, and mammography. There is a full-service blood lab and pharmacy.

Eighteen physicians now practice at least part time at 200 Pantigo Place, including in internal medicine, pediatrics, neurology, gynecology, orthopedic surgery, gastroenterology, and dermatology. A voucher system provides \$300,000 per year for the medically underserved to receive care from Dr. Schonfeld for pediatrics and Dr. George Dempsey for family medicine.

The foundation has bought and distributed automatic external

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defibrillators throughout the town for cardiac arrest emergencies. It does health benefits counseling, health fairs, school wellness programs (Bonac on Board to Wellness), mental health programs, and educational medical symposiums. The next one is a cardiac wellness symposium on March 6 at 9 a.m.

There are things that the Healthcare Foundation can do, but many things that it cannot do. It can't fix all the health problems here on the East End. And like most nonprofit foundations, it needs more funding and more dedicated people to get involved.

We're still in a recession (except for Wall Street), and the Healthcare Foundation could use your help. It only has 500 regular donors. The foundation is not part of the town or state government. It doesn't do glitzy gala events with celebrities. It just grinds along with the help of a small group of friends, providing services for people who really need them.


Frank got registered with Medicaid, got connected with a regular doctor, and was able to get back to work. He's doing okay. Diabetes is a tough thing to live with, but at least some local folks are giving him a helping hand. It makes all the difference.

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