



## **United Way Community Matters**

**By Mary Lou Goeke**

### **High Quality and Affordable Health Care for All January 8, 2009**

Last week Dominican Hospital accepted the invitation from President-elect Obama's Transition Team to convene a town hall meeting of County residents to discuss their own experiences and recommendations for overhauling the health care system in America. Over 130 people attended the meeting, ranging in age and interests from Boy Scouts to retired persons. The group had a wide range of personal experience with the health care system and proposed many creative ideas for changes for the future.

The overwhelming issues are access to services and high cost. Many people felt very strongly that we need to "bit the bullet" and increase taxes to make necessary improvements, including a standard electronic health record and a single-payer national health plan.

One subgroup identified many contributing factors and offered suggested solutions including the high cost of prescription drugs. Many people simply go without prescribed medications because the cost is prohibitive. They recommended regulating prices, prohibiting consumer advertising of prescription drugs and focusing on the use of generics. They agreed that healthcare should be viewed as a right, not a privilege and wanted universal coverage with strong emphasis on wellness and prevention. They noted the shortage of nurses and primary care providers and offered solutions to these problems, such as

providing subsidizing the cost of training. Another point that arose included the lack of communication among providers and the need for a national standard in electronic health records. The group also came up with a list of significant needs that our current health care system does not address such as: home care, long term care, custodial care, and end-of-life care; dental and vision care; chronic disease management and mental health. Additionally they felt that there is a lack of public policy on wellness and prevention and felt that the system would benefit from having more attention paid to preventative efforts.

The residents of the Pajaro Valley will soon have the same opportunity to attend a town hall meeting, sponsored by the Pajaro Valley Community Health Trust, to propose their own suggestions to the Obama administration. For more information, contact them at 761-5639.

*For the past 16 years Mary Lou Goeke has been the Executive Director of the United Way of Santa Cruz County. She has 32 years of experience providing social services to elders, children and families. The mission of United Way is to improve the lives of the people of Santa Cruz County by convening the community to seek solutions to their needs and by efficiently raising funds for the human care programs the United Way supports. Their website is [www.unitedwaysc.org](http://www.unitedwaysc.org).*