Local doctor receives prestigious award
By LAURA CLARK/The Daily Journal

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The California Academy of Family Physicians in April presented Dr. Robert Werra with the 2005 "Family Physician of the Year award."

Werra, who has practiced medicine at Ukiah Valley Primary Care Medical Group for 42 years, "is a tireless man, who, even in semi-retirement, can't seem to put down the stethoscope," the CAFP stated in a newsletter honoring Werra.

Lynne Coen, also a UVPC family physician, said she nominated Werra for the award because she felt like he "deserved some recognition for all he has done in his life his general dedication to patients to people's health and well-being.

"And one of the reasons I nominated him for Family Physician of the Year is because he is so dedicated to family practice as a profession. We are in a world of specialists and he fights for the family doc to still be one of the most important parts of health care. We get to know our patients; patients get to know us. They feel comfortable with us and we keep track of all the specialists for the patient, otherwise the patient feels lost. They have one specialist focus on one part of the body and another on a different part and nobody helps put it all together. That is what our job is, I feel," Coen said Friday.

Coen, who had to gather information from all parts of Werra's professional life -- including testimonials from various agencies, organizations, patients and colleagues over the years -- admitted it was a lot of work completing his submission, "but it was time that he got the recognition he deserves," she said.

"He's 76 and still pushing all this. Instead of just sitting in his recliner in his golden years, he's still actively promoting health for all," Coen said of her colleague, the man who recruited her.

Apparently, Coen is not alone in her sentiments.

"His espousal of cradle-to-grave practice is nowhere more apparent than when he delivers the babies of the same young women he once delivered a generation ago. ..."

"Children and teenagers have always been an important aspect of Dr. Werra's career. Every Thursday, he can be found volunteering his time at the Trinity Children and Family Services Program, a residential program for children and teenagers with histories of emotional and behavioral difficulties. In a letter, Connie Krantz, LVN, and Cheryl Porter of Trinity Ukiah said, Dr. Werra (a.k.a. Dr. Grandpa) takes care of the whole person, not just their medical needs. He treats our children with patience, kindness, dignity and respect. His devotion to them is unconditional. He has gained the respect and trust of children who often live in a world of fear and distrust," the CAFP newsletter states.

"I take care of two gems of Ukiah; one is Trinity School, the other is Hospice of Ukiah," Werra said Friday. "I have taken care of them (Trinity children) for 40 years and I have always enjoyed it.

"What Trinity does is give them a good education in a small school with devoted teachers, but more important, they are exposed to a caring environment of people who try to validate these children's self-worth. Any bit of encouragement and validation you can give to these children has to be beneficial and goes a long way to make them begin to feel that they can expect caring from other people, with the ultimate goal that they can give caring to others as they grow up. To be part of that really makes you feel this is really a worthwhile thing to do, and it's also fun because they are kids. You can joke and it makes you feel good too."

In the 1970s, Werra helped found Hospice of Ukiah and, since 1982, has been its medical director.

"Partly because his parents died at home and partly because of what he saw as a change in how families cared for the dying after World War II, Dr. Werra is an advocate and benefactor of Ukiah Hospice," CAFP states.

"We give care for terminally ill patients so that they can have as much quality of life as they can in their own home, or wherever they meet their final times," Werra said regarding Hospice.

Werra said the local hospice is all volunteer and accepts no reimbursement. Even though the services are donated to people, "you get more than you give," he said.

In other words, he said: "Everyone that works there is being reimbursed less than what they are worth, but their benefits are beyond expectations. I
have enjoyed working with that hospice for 25 years."

Werra said he was honored to receive the award.

"They interviewed me for their quarterly newsletter which goes out to 9,000 California docs," he said.

In addition, the CAFP entered Werra in a national competition. Apparently, each state submits its Family Physician of the Year to a national competition -- The American Academy of Family Physician of the Year.

Werra recently got a letter stating that he has been chosen as one of the top five who will compete for the national award. The winner will be notified after the final judging later this summer.

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