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Left to right, Frederick E. Smith, director of the health and wellness division of the Human Resources Agency of New Britain, Mayor Timothy Stewart, and Rocco Tricarico, executive director of the HRA of New Britain, celebrate the relocation of the Martin Luther King Jr. Center Tuesday. Oral and blood HIV test kits are on display. Condoms are free at the new location.

HRA division gets new home

By JAMES CRAVEN
STAFF WRITER

NEW BRITAIN — An agency already at the heart of improving the health of the city has moved one of its offices closer to its geographic center to better reach the people it serves.

The Human Resources Agency of New Britain held an open house at the new location of its Health and Wellness Division, at 88 Prospect St., Tuesday afternoon that drew Mayor Timothy Stewart and public health officials from around the area.

Frederick Smith, director of the division, said the facility will be an asset to the community's health and welfare.

"With this new location we're centrally located and able to better reach into the community," Smith said.

As part of the HRA Health and Wellness Division, the facility hopes to be a leader in HIV prevention through counseling and testing as well as a place for drug addicts, alcohol-



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Volunteer and recent HRA graduate Carmen Boria, right, and custodian Kolvin Irizarry at the Human Resources Agency of New Britain during the celebration.

ics and those who may engage in unsafe sex practices.

Formerly on Arch Street, Anthony Jackson first noticed the Health and Wellness Center while still in the grip of alcoholism.

"I had been released from prison and was still doing the things that helped to get me there," the 40-year-old Jackson said. "I found myself walking down Arch Street

and I wondered what the HRA was."

Jackson points out that to this day he doesn't know why he felt himself drawn to the building but gives thanks every day for it.

"I've been sober for 64 days now," he says, with no small amount of pride in his voice. "Without the people here, without their help, I don't know where I'd be."

Jackson, who has become a licensed asbestos worker, hopes to find a job soon.

"I'm just working through the program as best I can," he said. "But I'm determined."

As members of the staff, outfitted in red T-shirts with the saying "Ignorance is more dangerous than the disease," show off their new location, HRA Executive Director Rocco Tricarico and Mayor Timothy Stewart arrive.

"This is a beautiful facility," Stewart said. "This will be a benefit for anyone who may have HIV or is danger of getting it. HRA does so much for this community and I can't thank you enough."

HIV counseling and testing are offered at no cost and all services are confidential. The center is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Walk-ins are welcome, however, scheduled appointments are highly recommended and can be made by calling (860) 826-4482.

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