RIO VISTA RESIDENT
Ron Saldarini
IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN BERGEN COUNTY

- Home of the Month: 43 Walsh Dr.
- "NEW" Residents Recipe Column
- Become a Resident VIP - Details Inside!
Making a Difference: Ron Saldarini and Bergen Volunteer Medical Initiative

By Melissa Griege
Photos by Melissa Griege Photography

Rio Vista resident Ron Saldarini is enjoying his retirement in some of the usual ways: golf, theater, travel, and spending time with his wife Suzanne. However, Ron is not one to rest on his laurels. He is using his years of work experience to volunteer to provide free medical care for working adults without health insurance.

Bergen Volunteer Medical Initiative in Hackensack is a nonprofit that provides free primary and preventative medical care to low-income working adults in Bergen County who do not have medical insurance. Last year, they were able to help 1500 patients and are on track to serve 1800 in 2019. It was founded in 2009 by Dr. Sam Cassell who, like Ron, discovered during his retirement that he had more to offer. Sam participated in a medical mission in Haiti and met others who have volunteered for similar missions through organizations such as Volunteers in Medicine.

I sat down with Ron and BVMI President/CEO Amanda Missey to find out more about how they offer free medical care to Bergen County residents. "What attracted me to BVMI," says Ron, "is that Bergen County is one of the richest counties in the country, and yet there are 70,000 people without health insurance. The ability to help these families is very rewarding." Amanda
agrees, “These are hard-working people who are trying to make ends meet, but they do not qualify for medical insurance.”

Many of the clients are recent immigrants. In order to qualify for care at BVMI, you must be 18 or over and working. Children are covered by the government program Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) even if their parents do not qualify for Medicare or Medicaid. Individuals/families may earn up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level and still qualify for care at BVMI.

The majority of doctors who work at BVMI are retired, but there are many people who are still working. They currently have a team of 55 volunteer physicians, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and other healthcare professionals. In addition, all five Bergen County hospitals provide x-rays and advanced diagnostic procedures. Quest Diagnostics offers free lab services, and Becton Dickinson donates medical supplies. Many other companies also provide free or discounted services or make monetary donations to BVMI.

Ron has a Ph.D. in biochemistry and physiology and spent his career working on developing new vaccines, including working on the Prevnar vaccine for Pfizer. Prevnar helps protect those 65 and older from pneumococcal pneumonia. Ron currently serves on the board of trustees of BVMI as the treasurer.

“You should see the look on the patients’ faces,” Ron says with a smile. “So many of them come in seriously ill. When you see the joy on their faces at receiving quality medical care, it makes it all worth it. I see the same look of joy on the doctors’ and nurses’ faces when they are able to help someone. You feel like you are making a difference.”

BVMI is a licensed, ambulatory healthcare center and all volunteers are properly vetted and maintain their accreditations. New patients get a full-hour appointment on their first visit and a half-hour on follow-ups. “A lot of these patients have not gotten that kind of care in the past,” explains Amanda. “Many people
without insurance rely on ER visits for all illnesses and injuries. BVMI has reduced the number of ER visits in the county, and the lengthy visits give the patients time to ask the questions that they need to ask. Since we cover such a diverse population, we speak 20 languages here at BVMI."

Since they do not receive any government funding or insurance reimbursement, the organization relies on grants and generous donors to pay for all of the services that they provide. "We are always looking for more volunteers," Amanda added, "and money." If you are a medical professional and would like the opportunity to volunteer for this great cause, reach out to Ron or call Amanda at 201-342-2478. They will gladly accept new corporate sponsors or individual contributions. They also hold an anniversary gala once a year. It is the only fundraising event they hold and is usually in September. Keep an eye out for the 2019 event on www.bvmi.org. Next time you see Ron at the clubhouse or on the golf course, ask him to tell you more about this wonderful organization.