Editorials

Thought for Today: "Americans have always been able to handle austerity and even adversity. Prosperity is what is doing us in."
— James Reston, American journalist (1909-1990)

Care Mobile: great idea

A Ronald McDonald House Charities mobile clinic formerly used for dental care, but which was sidelined with the loss of TennCare funding, has found new life.

Its rebirth is occurring in Bradley County in a pilot program made possible by a Bradley Memorial Health Endowment Fund grant awarded by United Way.

Not only is the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile's reprise a huge shot in the arm for students enrolled in three Bradley County schools included in the pilot, it is marked proof of the value of the grant program overseen by the local United Way.

The grant program is made available from proceeds from the previous sale of the former Bradley Memorial Hospital. It is sustained year to year on investment income from these proceeds.

Getting the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile vehicle back on the road is the result of an invaluable— and innovative— partnership between the Bradley County School System, Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chattanooga, SkyRidge Medical Center, Children's Hospital at Erlanger and the United Way grant program.

Schools included in the limited pilot are Black Fox Elementary School, Waterville Elementary School and Ocoee Middle School.

As our newspaper reported in a recent front-page article, the former dental unit has been converted into a full medical facility. The newly named Ronald McDonald Care Mobile in January will begin making visits to each of the pilot schools to treat students in conjunction with the school nurse at each educational facility. Parents will be given full details on how the medical unit will operate.

Black Fox, Waterville and OMS were selected for the pilot based on large numbers of student illnesses. In many cases, these students are coming to school sick and are in need of medical assistance. The mobile clinic is not intended to replace a doctor's office and its nurse practitioner will work closely with the school's on-site nurse.

An advantage offered by the mobile clinic is its expanded opportunity for treating students' illnesses. Dr. Melissa Hamp will serve as a medical adviser for the mobile care unit. Dr. Allen Kohrt, medical director for Children's Hospital at Erlanger, will also assist with the program's coordination.

Many are to be credited for the development of this on-site medical brainstrom, but original players have been Andrea Lockery, coordinated school health director for Bradley County Schools, program coordinator Cathy Jennings and Jane Kaylor, executive director for Ronald McDonald House Charities.

Of particular excitement about this medical pilot is it brings immediate, professional care to the students within the three-school circle. Of added merit is its genuine potential. If the pilot infuses the kind of health enhancements for which it is intended at the trio of schools, then perhaps a program expansion into additional schools could be in order.

Yet, we see still another value.

Had this pilot not come along, a perfectly good mobile unit for medical care might still be sitting in a parking lot awaiting future deployment.

Its pilot use for serving students' medical needs — especially in schools showing statistically high rates of visits to the school nurse — is an appropriate strategy, one that keeps student health in the forefront of administrative decisions, as well as one that recycles a good original idea and converts it into an excellent practice.

We wish this family-friendly pilot well.

We applaud its birth while acknowledging, with gratitude, the seed from which it grew — United Way's Health Endowment Fund.