

# With Eagles, eye program sees success

## Eye Mobile RV provides exams for underserved kids

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By BRIAN McCULLOUGH, Staff Writer

WEST GOSHEN — Jermane Mayberry may no longer be keeping pass rushers away from Donovan McNabb, but the offensive lineman's legacy as a Philadelphia Eagle lives on.

Evidence of that was on hand Monday at the Community Volunteers in Medicine's Lawrence Drive offices in the form of the Eagles Youth Partnership Eye Mobile RV, which travels the region to provide eye screenings to school aged children.

The program started in 1996 when Mayberry, a first round draft pick and legally blind in his left eye, donated \$100,000 to start it.

For 12 years, **AREUFIT Health Services Inc.** has provided the exams in the 30-foot-long "big green machine" that uses images of Eagles players on its exterior to promote eye health for youth.

The Eagles Youth Partnership, a charity that partners with the Eagles on youth reading and eyecare programs, has provided services to more than 14,000 underserved children in the area since it started. Eagles owner Jeffrey Lurie and wife Christina head the charity's board of directors.

The Eagles participation gives the program a success it wouldn't otherwise be able to achieve, said Sarah Martinez-Helfman, executive director of the youth charity, by overcoming negative peer pressure.

"Ultimately what makes us rich is the brand of the Eagles," she said. "It's like the Pied Piper. They (students) will wear glasses because they're Eagles glasses."

Dr. Jeannine Stuart, president of Malvern-based **AREUFIT Health Services**, which helped the Eagles Youth Partnership purchase the vehicle, retrofit and equip it, puts it another way.

"One of the dominant driving forces behind the success of this program is the star power of the Philadelphia Eagles," she said

The charity concentrates its efforts in Philadelphia and Chester but makes rounds across the region, especially during the summer when school is out, Martinez-Helfman said.

In most cases, the children who participate in the mobile screenings have already been identified in school exams as having a need for eyecare. Through the program, they can purchase glasses for \$30, a fraction of their market costs.

The mobile operation typically sees 20 to 25 children on its visits. Remedies typically are eyeglasses, although Martinez-Helfman said the charity has at times provided surgery.

The program is having an impact on students, but much remains to be done, she said.

In Philadelphia, 63 percent of the students who fail their school exams don't get any treatment; before the Eye Mobile Program, that figure was 75 percent, Martinez-Helfan said.

For those who do take advantage of it, the program can make a life-changing difference.

"I know an eighth-grader whose reading level jumped four grades in two weeks," Martinez-Helfman said. "He went on to high school instead of being held back. Another kid, we were able to get surgery for. His mother was in tears."

The help from the program is appreciated locally.

"Our partnership with **AREUFIT** and the Eagle's Eye Mobile Program is a prime example of how we are able to provide so many vital services to uninsured families in Chester County," said Maureen Tomoschuk, president and CEO of Community Volunteers in Medicine. "We rely on our partners to help us bring healthcare services to those who need them most, like our uninsured children who desperately need quality eye care. "

To keep such programs going — the Eagles Youth Partnership has a a \$2 million annual budget, with the mobile eye operation costing about \$500,000 —Martinez-Helfman is counting on the success of the upcoming Eagles Flight Night!.

The event, being held Aug. 2 at Lincoln Financial Field, will give fans the opportunity to see their players in a "mic'd up" full-contact preseason practice.

It will also feature fireworks, player introductions just as at regular season games, interviews, behind-the-scenes footage and prizes.

