

CHASS Donation Newspaper Coverage

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Bridge company, duty-free shop donating \$200,000 to health center in southwest Detroit

By Shawn Wright

The **Detroit International Bridge Co.** and the duty-free **Ammex Global Marketplace** said today they will donate more than \$200,000 to the **Community Health and Social Services Center Inc.** in Southwest Detroit.

The money is part of an \$18 million capital campaign by CHASS that will be used toward construction, set to begin in the next 90 days, of a \$17 million health center. The 48,000-square-foot center is scheduled to open in 2011.

CHASS, established in 1970, has an annual operating budget of about \$5.7 million. Nearly 85 percent of its clients, mostly Latino and African-American women and children, don't have medical insurance.

The facility is about a mile away from the privately owned Ambassador Bridge, operated by DIBC, on Fort Street.

Bridge company owner Manuel "Matty" Moroun was not at the press conference, which was held at the **Doubletree Guest Suites Fort-Shelby**. But Maroun's wife, Nora, was on hand to make the official announcement. The project, she said, has been in the works for about six months.

"The first time I went into CHASS' clinic, I was blown away ... I couldn't believe what they were doing. I couldn't believe what they had to conquer," she said.

She said she saw children, young mothers and senior citizens crowded in the current health center, a former auto dealership at 5635 W. Fort St. The new health center will be built adjacent to the current one.

Ricardo Guzman, CEO of CHASS, said the new facility will triple the number of physicians, mid-level practitioners, nutritionists, social workers and dentists.

"The Moroun family has come to our aid when we needed it," Guzman said. "There's been throughout this discussion a concept of community benefits. Well, I'm here to tell you that we have community benefits from the Moroun family ... and I thank them."

The donation comes as Moroun is waging a hearts and minds battle in the region as he tries to construct a new bridge span adjacent to the one he bought in 1979.

Most public officials and civic leaders favor a proposed government-owned bridge that would be located about 2 miles downriver — an effort Moroun opposes as unfair to his business interests.

Moroun is often criticized for poor stewardship of his real estate holdings in Detroit, including the dilapidated Michigan Central Station.

"We understand there's a struggle right now between two entities, in terms of building this bridge," said Guzman. "The (public **Detroit River International Crossing**) project's community benefits package is out; it's done. I have the Ambassador Bridge folks who come and say, 'We want to work with you.' This is their community benefit to us."