

The Berkshire Eagle

Railroad St. Youth Project to get upgrade

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GREAT BARRINGTON — The Railroad Street Youth Project is getting help to upgrade its downtown facility from an unlikely source — a Denver-based kidney treatment company.

DaVita, which services 128,000 patients nationwide, is providing \$50,000 to the youth empowerment group for upgrades to its facility on Bridge Street. The project is part of Tour DaVita, a 262-mile, three-day cycling and outreach program intended to raise funds for kidney disease awareness and prevention programs.

More than 120 DaVita employees, physician partners and patients will arrive in Great Barrington on Sept. 17. The group will begin the cycling the following day, helping out with volunteer efforts here and in New York before leaving for Connecticut on Sept. 19. for the remainder of their ride.

Vince Hancock, a DaVita spokesman, said Great Barrington was selected because it's a small town.

"A lot of times we go into smaller communities because we want to make a lasting impact on the community," said Hancock.

The Great Barrington visit will coincide with the unveiling of the revamped Railroad Street space.

Paul McNeil, program director for Railroad Street, said it will be a "complete facelift" that will include more computers, an Internet café, televisions and a conference room.

Hancock said the company picked this route for its access to dialysis facilities, its scenic and cycling-friendly nature, and because of health rates in the two states, according to Hancock.

Obese individuals are three times as likely to develop kidney failure, and in Massachusetts and Connecticut, more than 22 percent of the population is obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

And while a youth organization might not be the first group that comes to mind when thinking of kidney disease, Hancock said it's important to explain the risk factors to them so they can avoid kidney problems later in life.

Funds will be donated to The Kidney TRUST, a nonprofit organization seeking to educate and raise awareness about kidney disease. For more information, go to TourDaVita.org.