



CLEM MURRAY / Staff Photographer

Marjorie Butler, 72, of Coatesville, has her eyes screened for glaucoma at Hutchinson Memorial U.A.M.E. Church.

The inspiration was a centenarian who treasures her eyesight.

A day of free eye exams in Coatesville

By **Kristin E. Holmes**
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The inspiration for a day of free eye screenings in Coatesville was a woman who worked until she was 90, still drives at 102, and can't stop talking about her beloved hometown.

Gladys Flamer, the centenarian-plus, would make her regular visit to the Moore Eye Institute and chat about the hardship in the community, recently hit by a series of arsons.

"When she comes, everybody gravi-

tates toward her," said Kim Alexander, an office manager at the institute in Exton, and "it ends up being a Q&A."

Yesterday, the doctors and staff who treat Flamer for her macular degeneration went to Coatesville to give the exams. A group of 15 medical professionals from Moore joined by others from Chester County set up shop at Hutchinson Memorial U.A.M.E. Church, Flamer's congregation in Coatesville.

"I think it's a tremendous benefit," Flamer said. "Any time you don't have

your eyesight, you're in trouble."

The eye screenings are part of a pilot project headed by Flamer's physician, Leonard Ginsburg and his institute colleague Nancy Crawford. The initiative offers a year of free medical care for people with eye diseases who have difficulty paying for medical services.

The screenings that are part of the program have been held at eight other locations since it started in December.

"Glaucoma is a silent disease in its

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early stages and it's something that is usually detected during a regular eye examination," Crawford said. "It's the number-one cause of blindness among African Americans."

About 50 people went to the church fellowship hall to be screened yesterday. Flamer, in a navy-blue hat with a white feather and matching blue pantsuit, welcomed them.

She talked about "my town of Coatesville" and its struggles during a time of economic hardship and arson. "So many of my friends have already suffered," Flamer said. "Even more have lost their health insurance."

Marjorie Butler, 72, of Coatesville, had her eyes checked yesterday after 10 years without an exam. She heard about the screenings from Flamer.

"She's one of the most inspiring people I know," Butler said.

Born June 5, 1906, Flamer



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Gladys Flamer (left), 102, of Coatesville, talks with physician Nancy Crawford of the Moore Eye Institute of Exton during the free eye exams at Hutchinson Memorial U.A.M.E. Church.

moved to Coatesville from a nearby farm after high school. She worked as a housekeeper and sales associate, married a truck driver, and lost two children in childbirth while watching the steel town thrive and then decline.

When it comes to Coatesville, Flamer is realistic and hopeful.

"It's tragic, really. We don't know when the fires are going to stop. I think there are copycats out there," Flamer said. "But the future will be good, every town has its good days and bad days."

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