

# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Tuesday, November 25, 2008

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## University study on health care losses includes Martinsville family [Back](#)



Greg Secrest and his younger son Christopher Blake, 9, are shown above. Secrest lost his job — and his family's health care coverage — in August. (Bulletin photo)

Tuesday, November 25, 2008

By KAREN THOMPSON - Bulletin Staff Writer

A Martinsville man and his family were highlighted in a recent Georgetown University study on the impact of the growing economic crisis on children's health care.

Greg Secrest of Martinsville worked at American of Martinsville for 10 years before he lost his job Aug. 29 due to the company's move of production overseas. Not only did he lose a major source of income, but his family also lost all its health insurance.

"At 12 o'clock midnight the night we were let go," American cut off the Secrests' health care coverage, which included medical, dental and

vision insurance, Secrest said.

Secrest said he would have to spend more than \$1,200 per month to maintain his family's health care coverage, an amount that far exceeds his ability to pay.

His wife, Rileen Secrest, was injured at her part-time job at Belk and has had health insurance under workers' compensation for the past two months. But Greg Secrest said once doctors clear her to return to work — possibly around Christmas — she will lose that coverage.

His stepdaughter, Lacey Faith Mize, has health insurance under her father. However, Secrest's sons, Samuel Tyler, 14, and Christopher Blake, 9, have not had insurance since Secrest's last day of work.

"Tyler wanted to play JV football," and Blake also has expressed interest in playing sports, Secrest said. However, he did not feel he could let them play because of the risk of injury.

Sports participation builds character, Secrest said, and he worries about his children missing out on a chance to interact with their peers in friendly competition.

Secrest learned about the Georgetown study of children's health care when applying for Family Access to Medical Insurance Security (FAMIS) a few weeks ago. FAMIS is a Virginia program that works with eligible families to provide health care to children.

Ann Walker, Project Connect outreach advocate who works under the Martinsville-Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness, helped Secrest fill out his FAMIS application. She was "approached by the people" conducting the study and asked to find area residents who had trouble affording health care.

When she met Secrest and learned his story, Walker decided he would be a perfect candidate for the study.

Walker submitted Secrest's contact information to Georgetown, and a researcher with the study contacted him a few weeks ago. The researcher interviewed him by phone over the course of several days, Secrest said, asking details about his job loss, family finances and concerns for his children.

Secrest has been taking a class at Patrick Henry Community College and job shadowing a respiratory therapy team at Memorial Hospital in Martinsville. He also looked into assistance through the Trade Act, which provides aid to workers whose jobs move overseas, so he could earn a certificate from Danville Community College to practice respiratory therapy.

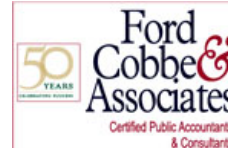
However, "it doesn't look like that's going to happen," Secrest said.

He recently learned at a cost analysis session in Danville that there is "not a chance for me" to enter the two-year respiratory therapist program because he missed the application deadline. Secrest lost his job in late August, but the deadline to enter the program was July 15.

That means Secrest would have to wait until July 2009 to get into the program and because the Trade Act limits aid to two years, he would not be approved for financial assistance for the program.

He now is considering nursing programs, he said, and he wants to get a job at Memorial Hospital in Martinsville so his family can stay in the area.

"We want to stay here, have our kids graduate here," he said, adding that his children have many friends here and the family is settled in Martinsville.



The Georgetown study focused on the impact losing health care coverage can have on a family.

"When a parent loses a job, the family often loses its only access to affordable health care coverage for themselves and their children," said Jocelyn Guyer, deputy executive director of the research and policy center, in a news release. "Behind the alarming unemployment numbers are a lot of uninsured families struggling to keep their kids safe and healthy."

The report estimates that during the past year, 4.1 million people have lost their employer-based coverage, according to the news release. Of the 4.1 million, about 1.2 million were children.

"Once I hear my kids have health care coverage, it will be a load off my mind," Secret said in the news release. "Making sure the boys are healthy and happy can make the rest of my family's problems seem small."

Secret recently received good news.

"I found out (Friday) morning I got accepted to FAMIS," he said, and now his sons have medical and dental insurance. However, FAMIS covers only children, so Secret remains uninsured.

Still, he said the news has been a relief to the family.

"How can you take care of anything else when your kids are sick?" Secret asked. "Your job, your car, your work ... everything can be replaced. They can't."

The Georgetown report identifies options policymakers could consider to address the crisis, including temporarily increasing federal support for Medicaid and promptly reauthorizing SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program) to soften the impact of the economic downturn on uninsured children.

Copies of the report "Keeping the Promise to Children and Families in Tough Economic Times" are available from <http://ccf.georgetown.edu>.

