

Cancer genetics program launched

Salem Health devotes resources to stop killer

Jonathan Bach Salem Statesman Journal
 USA TODAY NETWORK

The Salem Health Cancer Institute has launched a program to identify patients whose family history makes them an easier target for cancer.

The cancer genetics program kicked off in July with enough operating capital from the Salem Health Foundation to last through the end of the year. The program is running under the guidance of a new hire, Clinical Nurse Specialist Nancy Ledbetter.

Salem Health Hospitals & Clinics say cancer is the top cause of death among communities the health care provider serves. Anywhere from 5 to 10 percent of cancers stem from gene mutations passed down by family, Salem Health officials said.

Genetics testing can uncover inherited mutations inside patients’ genes, proteins or chromosomes, which can increase a patient’s risk of getting cancer, officials said.

Salem Health officials say the new program will save patients a trip out of town. Before they had to go to Portland where Oregon Health & Science University’s Knight Cancer Institute and Providence Health &

Services’ Genetic Risk Clinics offer the counseling.

Testing was previously available to Salem Health patients by referral under a contract with OHSU. Salem Health and OHSU used to operate with a formal partnership until they split in 2017.

However, genetics testing “was not tied to the partnership,” said Josh Franke, director of the Salem Health Cancer Institute.

The Salem Health Foundation granted \$84,000 in seed money to get Salem’s genetics program going. “This funding should help us build the program to a self-sustaining one by the end of the year,” Franke said.

In a statement, Salem Health Foundation Director Lisa Roth said, “The foundation understands the need and has invested to bring this pilot program to the Mid-Willamette Valley.”

“Additional testing can help save lives,” Roth said.

Screening for syndromes

Approximately one in three Americans develop cancer, according to the American Cancer Society.

Most cases within families are either a product of happenstance or exposure to risk factors such as smoking, according to the society. In some cases, though, cancer develops due to an inherited gene mutation in a family cancer syndrome.

That’s where genetics testing comes in.

Ledbetter said part of the genetics counseling is to check whether patients meet clinical testing criteria, which helps determine if their insurance will likely cover it. “If a person meets the criteria, insurance, including Medicare, typically covers it,” she said.

The list of criteria is long, she said. Generally speaking, however, being diagnosed with colon or breast cancer before age 50 or having certain cancer “clusters,” such as ovarian and breast cancer in a family, are factors.

“Those types of clusters point to various syndromes. There’s a long list of hereditary cancer syn-

dromes. Each of them is pretty rare,” Ledbetter said.

Patients are usually referred to testing by their medical provider instead of self-referring. As for the tests themselves, blood or saliva is collected and shipped to an out-of-state lab.

“The DNA is extracted and they do the test,” she said. “It takes a few weeks to get the results. And then we meet again and talk about those.”

“Most of the time, they’re negative,” she said. “If there’s a mutation, we tell them what the recommendations are for screening.

“So for example, people might start colon cancer screening much younger than usual — like 20s versus 45,” Ledbetter said.

In gynecological cases, surgery can be performed to remove a patients’ ovaries or uterus if those organs are at risk.

‘A diamond in the rough’

Ledbetter knew from a young age she wanted to work in health care. “This field didn’t exist when I was a kid,” she said.

After graduating with a bachelor’s of science in nursing from the Vanderbilt University School of Nursing in Nashville, Tennessee, Ledbetter ended up in oncology.

She lived and worked in Nashville, California’s Bay Area, where she obtained her master’s degree, and Portland, where she worked for Providence Health & Services for about 15 years starting in 2000. She also briefly worked at a private practice.

Ledbetter was plucked to run the cancer genetics program after applying for another job at Salem Health that dealt with ovarian cancer.

“Nancy came out of the blue from another posting that we had, and she’s really a diamond in the rough,” Franke said. “She has all of the experience. She has the ability to operate independently.”

Email jbach@statesmanjournal.com.

Obituaries

Lola Rae Skirvin

PHILOMATH - August 24, 1939 – August 19, 2018

Lola Skirvin, of Philomath passed away on August 19, 2018 of Pancreatic Cancer at her home.

Lola was born on August 24, 1939 in Moscow, Idaho to Yewell and Grace (Lingg) Plumley. She moved to Corvallis with her parents in 1953 where she graduated from high school and attended Linn-Benton Community College and Oregon State University.

Lola and her first husband, which they later divorced, had two sons, Tim was born in 1957 and Steven in 1960. On March 3, 1973, Lola was joined in marriage to Paul Skirvin in Corvallis.

She worked for the OSU Book Store, Oregon State University, and owned a candy and gift store in the Old Cannery in the late 70’s and early 80’s.

Lola received her SEL pilots license in 1976 and flew for 20+ years as far north as Alaska, east to New York and Quebec Canada, south to New Orleans, and many other destinations. The Skirvin’s had a small air strip in their back field, the local pilots called it Philomath International. She participated in two Petticoat Derbies and she and her co-pilot placed first in one.

Horses were her passion and Lola and her favorite mare, ‘Boomer,’ went to many of the local schooling shows. She is a past member of the Pinto Horse Association and American Paint Association. In May of 2018, Lola and her husband Paul donated 19+ acres to the City of Philomath for a city park, dedicated to continuing the Philomath Frolic and Rodeo in which Paul and his brothers, Carl and Walt, helped start over 30 years ago.

Lola is survived by her beloved husband Paul of 43 years; 2 children, Tim and Steve Lorain both of Philomath; five grandchildren, Adam, Zachary, Matt, Mike, and Rebecca Lorain; great-grandchildren; two brothers, Leo Plumley of Portland and Lonnie (Robyn) Plumley of Philomath; her Aunt Rhoda (Ken) Bacon of Lewiston, Idaho; numerous cousins, nieces and nephews; and her special friend of more than 50 years Nione Bethel.

Viewing will be at McHenry Funeral Home in Corvallis, OR from 8am-12pm on Wednesday, August 29th and from 8am-11am Thursday, August 30th. A Celebration of Life will be held at 3pm on Thursday, August 30th at Marquam United Methodist Church in Marquam, Oregon.



Connor Radnovich Salem Statesman Journal
 USA TODAY NETWORK

Gov. Kate Brown has appointed Kelly Fitzpatrick, a 16-year U.S. Army veteran, as director of the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs.

She’s been a veterans case worker, legislative policy supervisor, human resources director and congressional liaison.

“The jobs that I have sought have always been jobs that have interested me and jobs I thought would be challenging and fun,” Fitzpatrick said. “I felt like I could use those tools more in a position like the director of ODVA that has more resources available.”

If confirmed by the Senate, she will become the first woman to lead the agency since its founding in 1945.

Fitzpatrick said that being the first woman in the position isn’t personally important to her, but she hopes she can serve as a role model for women rising through the military’s ranks.

She said that her appointment shows Brown’s commitment to diversity; Fitzpatrick is also a lesbian.

Since 2016, Fitzpatrick has worked for U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, as his constituent services representative for veterans and military affairs — essentially a case worker.

In this role, she fielded calls from veterans or their families who were dealing with various problems, including housing insecurity and health issues.

“Kelly has been an invaluable team member who cares deeply for veterans and does everything she can to help them,” Merkley said. “At town halls I regularly hear from constituents who thanked me for all she did to help. I look forward to continuing to work with her as a federal partner.”



Her work also allowed her to create relationships with the many organizations in the state that work to support military members and veterans, she said. She will be building on those connections in her new role.

“That job has really opened a portal to look into the world of veterans issues,” Fitzpatrick said.

Fitzpatrick joined the Army in 1980 through the ROTC program at Boston University and worked in command and staff positions until 1996. She spent time as an assistant professor at West Point, a human resources director in South Korea and a public affairs officer for an infantry division in Georgia.

After retiring from the military, she earned a J.D. from the University of Maryland School of Law. She then spent a couple years on Capitol Hill, before going to the Congressional Activities Office of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence within the Department of Defense.

She worked there from 2004 to 2016, eventually becoming director of that office.

Assuming she is confirmed, Fitzpatrick said some of the top issues the office will address are veteran homelessness, mental health issues and high suicide rate.

Brown previously appointed Sheronne Blasi to this position, but she withdrew herself from consideration before Senate confirmation. Since February, Mitch Sparks has served as acting director, and he will continue in that role until Fitzpatrick is confirmed.

Contact the reporter at cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com or 503-399-6864, or follow him on Twitter at @CDRadnovich

Silverton moves to raze Eugene Field School

Bill Poehler Salem Statesman Journal
 USA TODAY NETWORK

SILVERTON – The Eugene Field School has stood on the block north of downtown Silverton for nearly 100 years.

Plans to demolish the school built in 1921 have taken time, but the city has approved funding for its razing to be completed by the end of the year.

The Silverton City Council has approved a \$144,171 contract with NorthStar for asbestos and lead paint remediation, and 20 percent more (\$28,834) in case of over-ages.

The city has budgeted \$746,386 for the demolition of the school buildings.

The Silver Falls School District closed the elementary school and moved the students to other schools in 2014. The 3.46-acre campus was sold to the city in 2017.

Discussion of demolition was on the city council agenda multiple times this year, but few offered opinions.

Now that the building’s destruction appears imminent, Silverton citizens are coming forward.

“It has a place in my

heart and many other people’s, too,” former mayor Stu Rasmussen said.

“I’ve been in the building recently. I listened to the hype from the school district that said the building is collapsing,” Rasmussen said. “I’m saying that you can restore and renovate buildings (rather)than tear them down.”

And Silverton resident Gene Pfeifer brought in a last-minute letter of intent to the city council the day of its August 6 meeting from a group from Portland who is interested in purchasing the property for \$1 million, the same amount the city purchased it for, and redeveloping the building.

“They issued a letter of intent because they didn’t have time to put a specific proposal together,” Pfeifer said.

The city, however, intends to use the property as a site for a new civic center.

Funds are not in place for a civic center, and moving forward on that would likely would re-

quire a bond measure.

An August 2017 survey of the site found asbestos and lead paint in various places on the property and an old underground heating oil storage tank needs to be removed before demolition can commence.

Silverton’s interim public works director Paul Eckley said once the contract with NorthStar is signed, the remediation should take place as early as next month.

Eckley said demolition could be completed in late November or early December.

The existing fence will remain around the building and the rest of the site could be fenced in after demolition.

“It could be graded out, but there is a basement in the building,” Silverton City Manager Christy Wurster said.

Wurster noted that the city purchased the property with the intention of building a civic center on the site.

Silverton Mayor Kyle Palmer is ready to move forward with the current plans.

CROWN MEMORIAL CENTERS CREMATION & BURIAL
A New Tradition™

LOW COST CREMATION & BURIAL

Simple Cremation \$595
NO Hidden Costs

SALEM 412 Lancaster Drive NE (503) 581-6265 PORTLAND 832 NE Broadway (503) 783-3393 EASTSIDE 1433 SE 122nd Ave (503) 783-6865	TUALATIN 8970 SW Tualatin Sherwood Rd (503) 885-7800 TIGARD 12995 SW Pacific Hwy (503) 783-6869 MILWAUKIE 17064 SE McLoughlin Blvd (503) 653-7076
---	---

Privately owned cremation facility.
 A Family Owned Oregon Business.

www.ANewTradition.com

OR-SAL-0008593-08