

Health Care Changes Coming to Oregon and Columbia County

By Scott Laird

The way Oregonians choose and receive their health care coverage is about to change in 2014. More changes are also on the horizon for Oregon Health Plan patients in Columbia County.

Sherrie Ford and Ashley Baggett from the Public Health Foundation of Columbia County were in Vernonia on August 27th to give a presentation on Cover Oregon, the new insurance marketplace where Oregonians can compare and enroll in insurance healthcare programs. Ford and Baggett also explained how Columbia Pacific CCO works. Columbia Pacific CCO is the new Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) that serves Oregon Health Plan (OHP) members in Clatsop, Columbia, western Douglas, and Tillamook Counties.

The presentation was organized by the Columbia Health Coalition, (CHC) a group of community stakeholders and citizens. Founded in 2007, the CHC partners with local organizations and agencies to improve health "where we live, work, learn and play." The presentation introduced the basics of health care transformation efforts in Columbia County and Oregon and explained where consumers can go for more information.

Enrollment in Cover Oregon begins in October with coverage starting in January 2014. Small businesses, individuals and families, and tribal communities will all be able to use the interactive webpage at www.coveroregon.com to calculate insurance premium costs and shop for the insurance plan that best fits their needs. Cover Oregon



is designed to provide access to one-stop shopping for health insurance, financial savings for customers, and support for consumers. "The idea is that you will have more choices, more control and more access to health insurance coverage than ever before," said Ford.

Cover Oregon will include coverage from public programs as well as private insurers. All applications will be done on-line and there will be trained community support advisors available to assist with the application process. The website will provide comparison shopping for customers and the program allows individual family members to choose different plans that best meet the needs for each person.

Columbia Pacific CCO is a network of health care providers, working together locally to serve people receiving health care coverage under the OHP. "It is an Oregon model to save health care costs," explained Ford during her presentation. CCOs have been organized throughout Oregon as an innovative way to improve patient care and simplify the way patients access care. The CCO's will act as the umbrellas for various provider groups, hospitals, health plans and agencies and is the strategy Oregon has developed to take advantage of federal health care reform.

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Spaghetti Fundraiser for Fields Family

The Vernonia community has organized a Spaghetti Dinner Fundraiser to benefit the Fields Family. The benefit will be held on Saturday, September 7 at 4:00 PM in the Vernonia Schools Cafeteria.

Angela Hernandez-Fields, along with her sister-in-law and three daughters were involved in a motor vehicle accident on August 19; daughter Lorelei was killed in the accident and another daughter, Kaceelynn remains hospitalized in Seattle. The fundraiser will help the family offset funeral costs, hospital bills and other needs.



Donations for the family are also being accepted at Wauna FCU and at Wells Fargo Bank, account #9702803637 - "Fields family car accident to help the family."

Levy to Keep Prisoners in Jail on November Ballot

Jail levy language has been filed with the Columbia County Elections office.

Commissioners referred the levy to the November ballot because lack of funds threaten to close the county jail altogether. Without the levy, the jail is predicted to be shut down by the end of 2013.

Already 500 prisoners have been released from the jail this year. Those that are sentenced are likely to only spend 1 or 2 nights in jail because of costs. "If we must close the jail due to lack of funding our communities will be less safe. It will negatively affect our property values and our quality of life," claims Earl Fisher, Columbia County Commissioner.

"It's critical the levy pass on

November 5th to support our local businesses and citizens," believes Trent Dolyniuk, owner of Blackbird Catering in St. Helens. Many have already come out in favor of the levy including, CEO Jeff Kemp of Pacific Stainless, the Columbia County Commissioners, State Senator Betsy Johnson, State Representative Brad Witt, Columbia County Sheriff Jeff Dickerson and Columbia City Mayor Cheryl Young.

The measure calls for a 58-cent increase per thousand dollar assessed property value. It would raise the money needed for the \$10 million deficit and funding for the 100 worst offenders to be maintained at the prison. The levy would last 4 years and then would have to be re-approved by the voters.

Johnson Bill Protects Home Buyers

By Scott Laird

Every once in a while one citizen can make a difference. Every once in a while our government does respond to the needs of citizens and take action.

Vernonia's Voice was recently made aware of an example of government at work, doing what it was intended to do-protect citizens.

Between the last two Oregon legislative sessions, State Senator Betsy Johnson was contacted by several people who had purchased homes in Vernonia from a private party; usually this was from a bank after foreclosure.

These homes had been declared "Substantially Damaged" after being flooded in 2007. A home is declared "Substantially Damaged" if it has been damaged by more than fifty percent of its value; being declared "Substantially Damaged" is the trigger for receiving access to federal funds in a federally declared

emergency.

The new homeowners that contacted Senator Johnson were unaware that their properties had been flood damaged. They were also unaware of the impact local development ordinances have on those flood damaged properties.

That's where Senator Betsy Johnson stepped in, got involved, and helped make changes to protect local citizens.

"Senator Johnson helped solve a unique problem related to our community," said Jim Tierney, Executive Director of Community Action Team (CAT).

"This is a great example of a real life situation where government got something passed and fixed a real problem," said Senator Johnson.



"The real message is that one citizen's experience can make a difference."

That one person, in this particular situation was a woman who had taken all of her net worth; approximately \$30,000, and purchased a home that had been foreclosed in Vernonia. She had

not been informed that her home was designated as "Substantially Damaged," and was also unaware that, because of that designation, she would be required by the City of Vernonia to either elevate the home she had just purchased or tear it down. She began contacting Senator Johnson, as well as other government officials, about her situation.

"If you or I had sold her the house without telling her, we would

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