

RockMed All Night Long

AFTER HOURS WITH WHITE BIRD AT THE OREGON COUNTRY FAIR

By Elisha Young

When I think about a medical center, the picture that comes to mind is a bland, sterile environment adorned with subpar art. That is the exact opposite of what I found during an overnight visit in White Bird's medical tents earlier this month at the Oregon Country Fair.

As part of its Rock Medicine program, RockMed for short, White Bird operates two locations offering crisis and medical services within the OCF grounds during the annual three-day event.

The main location, Big Bird, is its flagship center, located in the main stage meadow area of the Fair. Little Wing in Xavanadu is the second location, and it made its debut as a full-fledged medical unit this year for the 50th anniversary of OCF.

On Thursday, before the Fair opened up to the general public, I caught up with Wren Arrington for a tour of Little Wing.

When I arrived, several volunteers seated inside a cozy wooden booth greeted me. Everyone was ecstatic for the Fair to begin and happy to get to be a part of White Bird. While waiting for Arrington, I got to see how

the front line worked their magic.

An OCF staff member arrived at the desk with a cut on her foot. She was greeted with a smile while the volunteers triaged her situation and provided first-aid supplies, including an antibacterial cream and a bandage.

I found myself impressed at how efficient they were and at the level of compassion provided for something so small.

Arrington greeted me and led me through a wooden door for a tour of the inner workings. The calming environment of Little Wing blew me away. Just outside the door, the hustle and bustle of last-minute set up to prepare for opening day was going strong, yet inside it was an oasis.

The ground was covered with rugs, and tapestries adorned the separate areas and edges of the booth. The area is spacious, containing a full-on medical room stocked with supplies, much like a welcoming mini hospital.

There were additional "down tent" rooms, cozy private areas set up where individuals who took their party a little too far could calm down, rest, speak with crisis workers and reset.

Additionally, there is a dispatch area, a large map of the fairgrounds, and even a lounge area for the volunteers to take breaks and have their shift-change meetings.

When the tour was complete, I worked out the details with Arrington for a night visit.

It was after midnight on Friday when I arrived at Little Wing to meet with Liz Levin, a trained crisis worker for White Bird. She was beginning her overnight shift. As she led me back to the staff area for my observation, I found myself once again taken away by the ambience of White Bird's center.

If you have never been in the Fair at nighttime — a coveted privilege reserved for staff, volunteers and vendors — let's just say it is a visual experience. Between the booths, Fairgoers' costumes and the lit-up art pieces, it offers a magic array of colorful lights.

That atmosphere continues when you enter White Bird's booth. Strands of lights wind around the trees and around the down tents. Even the medical cross atop

the booth was lit up and complete with a multi-colored disco ball. Little Wing managed to capture the whimsy of nighttime at the Fair, yet it was muted enough to be a quiet sanctuary.

Levin, who works at *Eugene Weekly* as circulation director, has been a White Bird volunteer with the RockMed program for 15 years. She has no plans of stopping anytime soon. Besides Levin, another 12 volunteers staffed the overnight shift, including a physician, nurses, paramedics, crisis counselors and a dispatch operator.

Around 1:30 am a call came in to dispatch. The response by the volunteers was incredibly quick. They sent out what they refer to as an "away team": a medical worker and a crisis counselor. While dispatch gathered information, the away team gathered their supplies.

They were out the door in less than two minutes, and less than five minutes later they arrived back with their patient.

Levin explained that most of the call-outs are medical, but they always send a crisis counselor as well. Even in medical situations, the crisis worker can help to gather background information as well as work to calm down family and friends, while diffusing the situation.

All in all, I spent about three hours inside of the Little Wing location Friday night. Over the course of my visit, I was able to witness three outcalls, and six patients checked in to White Bird. It's hard to say how many people they treated in full on Saturday night, as basic first aid is handled at the front of the booth, and there is also the original Big Bird location.

To honor privacy, I was unable to go inside the treatment rooms and down tents with the patients, but for an inside look, head to EugeneWeekly.com and read an essay by Dr. Anne Cooley, medical director for the RockMed program. Her essay provides a glimpse of what goes on behind the curtain.

When you go to White Bird you can expect a human connection with no judgmental attitudes. Every person who went through White Bird during my visit was treated so warmly, with so much empathy and understanding.

The organization's humanity left me wishing all facets of medical care could follow this model. ■

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• The legislative session is over, but the Oregon Republicans are still mad at **Gov. Kate Brown**. As first reported by the conservative-leaning newspaper *The Washington Times*, the Oregon Republican Party announced its intention to launch a recall campaign of Brown. This is the second recall committee organized to unseat Brown. Some representatives from Flush Down Kate Brown, which became an active recall committee July 15, expressed anger on the Oregon Republicans' Facebook page, claiming the Republicans will complicate the signature-signing process. The road to recalling Brown is long. A recall petition needs 280,050 signatures, and then voters must approve the recall in an election — which, if enough signatures are gathered, would possibly be in November.



• **Kudos to Rachael Carnes**, a local playwright and a regular writer for *EW*. Her new play, *Partner Of* —, is a finalist in the Samuel French 44th Annual Off Off Broadway Short Play Festival, which opens Aug. 21 for a week-long run in New York City. The festival picked 30 of more than 900 submissions from around the world to present live to a panel of judges; six of those finalists will be published and licensed for production by French.

• **Fifty years ago this week began the historic eight-day journey to the Moon**, a voyage that capped a momentous decade of space flight for NASA and the United States. The lunar module to Apollo 11, *Eagle*, touched down and ended a decade-long race with the Soviet Union to put a man on the lunar surface. Neil Armstrong, followed by Buzz Aldrin, became the first humans to walk on Earth's only permanent satellite. It was the first of six manned Apollo flights that reached the Moon. The Apollo program ended in 1975. The Space Shuttle program started in 1981 and ended in 2011. What's next? Mars or beyond? The cost is exorbitant, but the science, the theater and the majesty are meaningful.