

# FLU: Cheree spent 21 days in the hospital

Continued from 1A

crashed and “she all but stopped breathing,” Jeremy recalls. “Now, it was an emergency situation. The prognosis was extremely bad — the doctor said he didn’t think she would survive the night. They called Life Flight.”

Cheree doesn’t remember any of this or what came next. At Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, the Umatilla High School graduate lay in a medically induced coma. A test confirmed the H1N1 virus had developed into Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome, a sudden failure of the respiratory system that often kills its victims. Her family was told to prepare for the worst. Jeremy’s mind reeled.

“I love her more than oxygen,” Jeremy said. “Nothing else holds any value when your best friend is dying.”

As he talked, he shot an adoring look at Cheree who sat next to him on a leather couch in their Hermiston home. She smiled at him and took over the narration.

Cheree said she learned after the worst was over that Jeremy had been determinedly optimistic and focused on every aspect of her care during her hospitalization.

“Without him, I wouldn’t be here,” she said. “He was a huge advocate for me.”

Jeremy, along with Cheree’s sister and two brothers, had taken an active role.

The little team showed up at morning rounds, grilled the doctors and worked to understand every detail.

At one point, Jeremy said he noticed Cheree’s day and night doctors were using slightly different protocols and he insisted they choose one. He also tried to infuse the nurses with Team Cheree spirit.

“I told them, ‘If you don’t believe 100 percent that she’s going to walk out of this room, I don’t want you near her,’” Jeremy remembers saying.

He scrubbed up and donned gown, booties and mask to enter the ICU where Cheree lay in a special bed that encased her body, rocked her back and forth and allowed her to lay on her stomach for long periods to aid in removing fluid accumulated in the lungs. When he lay on the floor beneath the bed, Jeremy could see his wife’s face, feet and part of a tattoo on her shoulder. In that position, he talked to Cheree and shared encouraging Facebook comments posted by friends.

“I realized there were things left unsaid,” Jeremy said. “All I wanted was to tell her I loved her and know she heard it.”

Jeremy had good reason to be anxious. OHSU’s Chief of Pulmonary and Critical Care, Dr. David Jacoby, said overall mortality for people with ARDS is about 30 percent. Some who live are never the same.

“Lung injury is often severe, requiring prolonged time on mechanical ventilation,” Jacoby said. “Sometimes the lung injury is so bad that the patient can never get off the ventilator.”

Cheree finally awoke after two weeks, feeling confused when she saw her sister and brother standing bedside. She noticed a poster of her volleyball team taped to the wall. She remembers asking for an orange Slurpee — something she had never craved before.

Before this point, Jeremy said, her improvement had been glacial, “millimeters on a scale of miles.” Now, her recovery sped into overdrive.

“It was all her,” Jeremy said. “She’s so tough. She got better every two hours. She was weaned from the ventilator before anyone thought possible.”

Cheree spent 21 days in the hospital and spent months regaining her strength and voice. Jeremy took two months of sick leave. They remain in awe of family and friends who cared for the couple’s children and supplied meals for months.

Both Cheree and Jeremy say their faith in God remains not only intact, but strengthened.

“We both feel like I got sick and survived for a reason,” Cheree said.

They know ARDS is often fatal. While at OHSU, Jeremy got to know the spouse of another ARDS

patient who eventually died. This fall, Cheree attended the funeral of a childhood friend who lost the battle with the flu-induced illness.

They say the odyssey has shifted their priorities.

“We realized how most stuff just doesn’t matter,” Jeremy said.

“We reevaluated everything in our lives and decided to come home,” Cheree said.

The couple sold their house in the The Dalles and moved to Hermiston, where Jeremy had grown up. Cheree was raised just down the highway in Umatilla.

Jeremy now works as a firefighter/paramedic for Hermiston Fire & Emergency Services. Cheree, a year out from her brutal battle, is feeling livelier and can envision going back to coaching eventually.

Flu shots are no longer optional for Cheree and Jeremy. She hadn’t gotten one that winter, but now ...

“Every year,” Jeremy said. “Forever.”

“Yes,” Cheree said.

OHSU’s Jacoby would applaud that decision.

“While I’m not certain I could say that you could never get critically ill from influenza after having a flu shot,” he said, “there is no doubt that the likelihood is much less if you get a flu shot.”

Contact Kathy Aney at [kaney@eastoregonian.com](mailto:kaney@eastoregonian.com) or call 541-966-0810.

# HERMISTON: 114 teams will play more than 250 games around the city

Continued from 1A

Ken Gillet, who owns Ye Olde Pizza Shoppe with his wife Kim, said local restaurants also experience a bump in business when there is a tournament in town.

“There’s a very big impact,” he said.

A team from Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, has already made reservations for dinner this weekend, he said, and so has a team from Irrigon. Gillet said he’s grateful to the school district for its role in bringing such big events to town.

“If you get a little boost here and there, every little bit helps,” he said.

Hermiston School District sometimes charges for the services of a custodian or other cost outlays, but has developed a policy of not charging facility rental fees to nonprofit tournaments that include Hermiston students.

District administrators say they see it as way to give back to the community by providing incentive for groups to host tournaments — that way Hermiston athletes and their families don’t have to trav-

el and local hotels, stores, restaurants and gas stations benefit from the extra customers.

Mike Kay, operations manager for Hermiston School District, said he and deputy superintendent Wade Smith are working with a consultant to put together a detailed report on the true economic impact of such events. He said he didn’t want to give away any numbers before the report is finalized and presented to the school board next month, but “when you see the impact, it’s pretty impressive.”

He acknowledged Hermiston’s increasing popularity as a destination for basketball tournaments, state football championships, OSAA district meets, wrestling tournaments and more.

“It’s a pretty exciting time,” he said.

This weekend the 114 basketball teams in the AAU tournament will play more than 250 games in school gyms around the city (plus Umatilla and Stanfield) starting at 9 a.m. Saturday and extending through Sunday evening.

# Oregon jobless rate lowest since start of Great Recession

PORTLAND (AP) — Oregon’s unemployment rate has dropped to a level not seen since the days before the economy plunged off a cliff into the Great Recession.

The December unemployment rate fell to 6.7 percent, the state Employment Department said Wednesday, a result of strong job gains in the last three months of 2014 and a slackening in the rush to rejoin the workforce.

The last time the rate was as low was in August 2008.

It had hovered at 7 percent for months as the state recorded job gains, encouraging people who’d stopped looking for work during and after the recession to start putting in applications.

But in December, the

agency said, the labor force grew only slightly.

The agency says job gains in December topped 8,000, and totaled about 24,000 for the last quarter of the year.

December hiring was unusually widespread in the various sectors of the economy, the agency said.

Job gains were strong in government, rebounding after a few years of cuts, and in construction, health care, transportation, warehousing, utilities, restaurants and lodging.

Retail job gains were 2,000 higher than normal.

“That means retailers hired more people than they usually do during the holiday season,” said a state economist, Nick Belcickis.

# ENERGY: Wind turbine to save another \$480,000 over next 30 years

Continued from 1A

ing then-facilities manager Michael Cooper. Cooper was critical of the facility’s high energy bills, which at the time totaled more than \$100,000 per year.

The first phase of Cooper’s plan was to commission a study identifying ways they could improve energy efficiency. On his watch, Tamastlikt slashed its electricity consumption

by 63 percent and natural gas consumption by 76 percent over the next decade.

“The mantra was reduce the use, and then renew,” Conner said.

With efficiency vastly improved, Tamastlikt turned its attention to integrating renewable energy and achieving net-zero consumption — meaning the total amount of energy used by the building is equal to the amount of renewable energy

generated on site.

Cooper championed the wind turbine project before he died Feb. 12, 2014. The turbine began operating in March 2014 and was dedicated in May. It is expected to offset roughly 20 percent of the building’s energy demand and save another \$480,000 over the next 30 years.

The carport will only continue to slash Tamastlikt’s energy consumption,

Conner said.

Pacific Power’s customer-driven Blue Sky program recently awarded a total of \$1.8 million for solar projects across Oregon. Since 2006, the program has voluntarily funded work at more than 75 facilities producing 6.5 megawatts of clean energy.

Contact George Plaven at [gplaven@eastoregonian.com](mailto:gplaven@eastoregonian.com) or 541-564-4547.

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