



A vehicle crosses the bridge over the Umatilla River at Nolin Grade Road on the first day of fall Friday east of Echo.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

CASON: ‘This is such a positive place’

Continued from 1A

other members of the non-profit’s board secured a site and designed the facility, modeled after the Dougy Center.

On Sunday, more than 250 people attended an open house at the center at 1416 SE Court. Visitors drove from as far away as Arlington, Ione and Walla Walla to tour the facility, which provides peer support groups for grieving children, teens and family members.

In the cozy reception room hangs a photo of Cason and his sister Lydia, showing from behind the siblings with their arms around each other. The image inspired the Cason’s Place logo.

On one side of the building is a “talking room” for teens. On the other side, younger children will gather twice-monthly to share difficult feelings with other kids who are in the same boat. Parents meet in the building’s conference room.

The teen talking room, an oasis of comfy couches, offers a safe place to share. The room for younger children has oversized pillows and teddy bears.

After a chat of 20 minutes or so, the kids move to activity rooms designed for their age group and then regroup for another talking session.

The Volcano Room offers teens a place to release tension by yelling, stomping on bubble wrap, warring with pool noodles and engaging in other physical activity. In another room, they can don boxing gloves and hit a punching bag. In the game room, they play air hockey, foosball or darts. There’s also an art room.

Spaces designed for younger children include a volcano room, art area, paint splatter room, theater, Lego and sand table room and a faux hospital room stocked with toy stethoscopes, syringes, bandages and scrubs. Different community members sponsored each room and helped design them.

Retired Pendleton High School counselor Vickie Read, who came



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The elementary art room at Cason’s Place was designed by a pair of local high school students. The facility offers guests 19 differently themed rooms for grief counseling.

to the open house, marveled at the center.

“This is such a positive place,” Read said. “Every room is dedicated to a piece of the healing process.”

Lydia Terjeson traveled from her home in Coeur d’ Alene, Idaho, for the open house. She hopes Cason’s Place will help others heal just as the Dougy Center aided her and her parents. After Cason’s death, she felt isolated.

“Most of my friends hadn’t even had a grandparent die, much less a brother they saw every single day. They didn’t know what to say,” she said. “It was a lonely feeling.”

Her load lightened at the Dougy Center. Kids shared their grief, she said, and no one judged. Emotions ran the gamut. One girl who had lost her mother cried a lot, but also laughed and smiled.

“I learned that grief and happiness aren’t mutually exclusive,” Lydia said.

Cason’s parents had also gone to a dark place where just getting up and getting dressed took Herculean effort. After work, they sometimes grabbed blankets and went to separate corners to nap. When they started attending an adult support group at the Dougy Center, they discovered peers who understood. The fog started to lift.

“The Dougy Center really saved our lives,” Lydia said.

Mary Len Rees, of Helix, was a facilitator at the Dougy Center and will serve the same role at Cason’s Place. She finds that grieving adults and kids find relief in telling their own stories to peers who know similar pain.

“Saying it out loud is healing,” Rees said. “You release emotions that get trapped like a pressure cooker. Kids learn to speak about their loss and then move forward.”

Talking isn’t required, however.

“You can talk or you can pass,” Matt Terjeson said.

He said Rees is one of 11 facilitators who are ready to go, though more are needed. The next training session is Oct. 21-22.

To register for groups, go to www.casonspcace.org. Select “Our Services” and click on “Join Our Support Group.”

Matt often gets emotional as he looks around the center named after his son. He couldn’t be happier with how it turned out.

“It’s not a big scary place,” he said. “It’s a welcoming place.”

A place where everybody knows your name.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

HOSPITAL: Was estimated to cost \$4.3 million to build

Continued from 1A

health system, which has helped treat people in rural areas, or those who live too far away to regularly come to in-person appointments.

“This project will fully round out and encompass the spectrum of health care in our community,” she said.

Robert McGuirk, a consultant for Lifeways as they prepared their certificate of need, said it wasn’t feasible for either of the hospitals within 50 miles of the proposed facility (Good Shepherd in Hermiston and St. Anthony in Pendleton) to have their own psychiatric facility.

“It will not have an adverse impact on existing hospitals,” he said. “It will contribute to the overall health of the hospital system.”

Construction on the facility at 1212 W. Linda Ave., Hermiston is nearing completion. The building is on land leased to Lifeways by Good Shepherd. When first announced, the project was estimated to cost \$4.3 million to build and \$2.8 million to operate. Cordeniz said they received seed money from several entities, as well as grants, but they would continue to seek funds for initial operating costs and furnishing the building.

The room was crowded with people from Ontario, Baker City, The Dalles and La Grande — and several locals — most of whom spoke up in support of the facility.

Sarah Sherman, a community health worker at St. Alphonsus Medical Center in Ontario, said many times, their patients have to be taken 200 or 300 miles away from home to be treated.

“We lack resources for a mental health inpatient setting,” she said. “Hermiston is not exactly in our back yard, but it gives them another option.”

Two Umatilla County commissioners, Bill Elfering and George Murdock, spoke in support of the facility, noting the strain law enforcement services face without adequate places to treat mental health patients.

“Since the facility (Blue Mountain Recover Center) in Pendleton closed, hospitals have some means of taking care, but most often, they end up in our holding cells,” Elfering said. “I think (Aspen Springs’) existence in the community would prevent people from getting into situations if they had a place to go to be treated.”

The panel also heard from Bob Joondeph, the executive director of Disability Rights Oregon. Joondeph, who is based in Portland, said he was not speaking for or against the facility, but asked the panel to consider some things before they decide.

“Our primary attention is to people’s legal rights,” he said. “Are care and residential facilities up to snuff? Can people get out in a timely manner, and into the appropriate service? That can prevent a person from spiraling into crisis.”

Joondeph said he knew the cost of services for the facility would be a major factor, and asked the panel to consider if the facility was the best use of funds.

“Is a hospital level of care absolutely necessary to address the crisis needs of people in this area? Will investment in that area limit services in other areas such as crisis services? I don’t know the answer to these questions,” he said. “But I think they should be addressed.”

The OHA will accept written comments about the facility until Oct. 3 at 5 p.m.

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UMATILLA: Latest plan for the transfer of the land is Dec. 1

Continued from 1A

completing all of the necessary environmental impact studies. But until the Army transfers the land, the National Guard is a tenant and not the property’s owner.

Camp Umatilla is one of four training centers in the state, all overseen by Oregon Training Command. According to the U.S. Army’s website, it is the “Oregon National Guard’s 1st Infantry Training Battalion of the 249th Regional Training Institute and the only certified Army infantry training academy west of the Mississippi River in the continental United States.”

Hoback said the land transfer will likely lead to a moderate increase in staffing and other activity out at the camp, including some units doing their annual training there during the summer.

“I think it’s going to be good for the community,” he said.

He said the people using the base will be Oregonians’ “neighbors and friends” instead of people coming in from out of state.

After years of delays, the latest plan is for the transfer of the depot land to happen on Dec. 1. About 7,400 acres will go to the Oregon Military Department, while about 5,600 acres will become a wildlife refuge and approximately 4,000 acres will be used for industrial, agricultural and right of way development. The transportation package passed by the state legislature this year sets aside money for the Columbia Development Authority to improve access to the depot from Interstate 82.

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HERMISTON: Working on improvement plan for infrastructure

Continued from 1A

were increased by 10 percent in each zone, with a single family dwelling in an R-1 zone now allowed to take up 40 percent of the lot instead of 30, plus another 10 percent for a porch, gazebo or patio. Front yard setbacks were also reduced. While garages must still be 20 feet from the front of a property, other parts of the home can now come within 15 feet and covered porches can come within 10.

Spencer had previously called Hermiston’s standards more conservative than in many other cities, and the planning commission recommended the changes the council adopted.

For “infill” properties inside the city that are surrounded by other development but face some

constraint such as an unusual shape, the council adopted a new program in which owners can more easily apply for variances.

Spencer said he often sees properties where an additional house could be added, but owners lose interest when they find out they would face a long process with multiple applications, multiple hearings and a \$420 fee per variance.

“The cost of doing it is so high they just walk away,” he said.

For such properties there will now be a single process in which all of the applications for the needed variances could be combined into one streamlined process costing \$475.

Spencer said the infill program would only be available for properties where applicants have shown that they cannot develop

the property without multiple variances.

“They have to come in and say ‘There’s no way I can do x, y and z,’” he said.

Spencer said the other two barriers that Hermiston faces for residential development are critical infrastructure needs and the high cost of skilled labor. The city is currently working on a capital improvement plan for infrastructure, and Spencer said they were looking at what they could do for the labor problem, which is made difficult by the lack of license reciprocity agreements between Oregon and Washington to allow contractors licensed in one state to work in the other.

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