

Good Shepherd receives funding for colorectal cancer kits

By ANTONIO ARREDONDO
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The Good Shepherd Health Care System in Hermiston is one of nine Oregon organizations to receive a grant from Oregon Health & Science University to address local cancer-related needs.

The OHSU Knight Cancer Institute's Community Partnership Program awarded funding to Good Shepherd to help with a new project — one that aims to increase colorectal cancer screening rates.

In years past, Good Shepherd has sent out fecal occult blood test kits, a preliminary

take-home test that aims to identify those at risk for colorectal cancer for those between 50 and 75. Once returned for lab testing, these test kits help individuals. But Director of Community Health and Outreach Jessica Reker said returns have been low.

"The return rate on (the kits) was only about 10 to 15%," she said.

With the test kits free of charge, Reker and the medical staff knew that cost wasn't an issue. Instead, they needed patients to buy into the program. Part of that was shifting who provided information.

With the funding, patients now will learn about and



Good Shepherd Health Care System/Contributed Photo, File
Good Shepherd Health Care System, Hermiston, is one of nine Oregon organizations to receive a grant from Oregon Health & Science University to address local cancer-related needs, OHSU announced July 13, 2022.

receive FOBT kits from their primary care physician. Before, they learned from other

medical providers that many patients may not have known. "The patient-provider

relationship is a very trusting relationship," Reker said. "It just makes sense to utilize it."

While the focus of the project is ultimately to lower late-stage colorectal cancer screening rates, the way Good Shepherd hopes to achieve that goal is to increase education on the matter. Using physicians that know the patient could ease tensions surrounding the subject, increasing education.

Along with education, Reker and Good Shepherd Community Health Educator Catherine Wisniewski know there are extra hurdles in Hermiston. With over a quarter of the city's popula-

tion having a Latino background, Good Shepherd is including bilingual test kits and interpreters.

"To ensure the approach is socially and culturally appropriate, GSHCS clinic partners have bilingual and bicultural staff available to assist with this initiative," Wisniewski said in a press release.

Per the terms of the OHSU grant, Good Shepherd aims to have 60 FOBT kits returned and 120 individuals educated, but it's shooting for higher numbers.

If those base numbers are realized, though, the program can continue long-term with funding from OHSU.

Ombudsmen seek to advocate for local seniors

By ANTONIO ARREDONDO
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — There may not be very many long-term care ombudsman in the Pendleton area, but their work assisting seniors does not go unnoticed.

A long-term care ombudsman is a state-appointed, certified advocate for those living in senior living facilities. Allowed in the facilities at any time, ombudsmen around the state work to elevate seniors' voices.

Valerie Conner first learned about the role while at a library in Beaverton, and the role struck a nerve. Her father had spent time in an assisted living facility while suffering from dementia, and Conner saw how the people had cared for her father and her family.

"I said, 'Hey, I want to be there for other families like they were there for ours,'" the four-year ombudsman said.

After completing training to earn her certification, she worked throughout the Portland area, including time in Tigard.

"I get to know the resi-



Julie Maw/Contributed Photo
Valerie Conner, left, meets with a resident. As a volunteer long-term care ombudsman, it is her job to advocate for seniors in assisted living facilities.

dents, enter the facilities, and become a known advocate for the residents," Conner said.

Conner traveled through the halls, meeting and getting to know the residents face-to-face. As an ombudsman, she helped residents with complaints, worked out solutions and let staff know when one of her residents was not receiving proper care.

That all changed due to the pandemic.

In 2020, Conner went

from seeing residents throughout the week to not being allowed on the premises due to health and safety concerns. And when she and her husband moved in 2021 from the Portland area to be closer to her hometown, Pilot Rock, it meant that Conner was advocating for people she hadn't even met.

She still worked hard for the seniors, though things were conducted through phone calls. After volun-

teering as an ombudsman in Milton-Freewater, Conner now spends time with residents in Pendleton, working at McKay Creek Estates and Willowbrook Terrace.

During one of the first times Conner visited McKay Creek, she saw the staff decked out in Seahawks gear. It turned out to be a sports-themed day at the facility, an event Conner said demonstrated the level of care patients received.

"People here are just kinder," Conner said, "If you go to the cities, a lot of people are new to the area, and don't know the residents. Here, everybody knows everybody."

Conner is one of only two ombudsmen in the Pendleton area and hopes that many more locals can get in on the experience. There are not many in the profession in Eastern Oregon, and many higher-ups are spread thin trying to provide care for seniors.

If you are interested in becoming a certified ombudsman, contact Ombudsman Volunteer Recruitment Specialist Julie Maw at 971-600-6149.

Local defendants in federal murder cases seek to postpone trials

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PORTLAND — The defense for Kawlija Scott, 25, of Pendleton, has asked the federal court in Portland to continue the criminal case against him for the May 25 slaying of a man on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Defense attorney Susan Russell on Thursday, July 21, asked the court to delay Scott's trial from Aug. 16 to at least Nov. 15.

"The ends of justice served by granting this motion outweigh the best interests of the public," according to the motion, "and Mr. Scott in a speedy trial because the additional time is necessary to afford defense counsel sufficient time to complete discovery, investigate the case, conduct research, consult with Mr. Scott, and prepare his case."

Federal prosecutors have not objected to the delay. Magistrate Judge Michael W. Mosman has yet to grant the request.

Scott, an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, faces charges of second-degree murder and assault with a dangerous weapon in the slaying of Gabriel Freeman, 27, at his residence on Parr Lane on the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Freeman died at CHI St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton. Scott has pleaded not guilty to the charges. He remains in custody at the Multnomah County Jail, Portland.

And the defense for Skylar Crowe of Pendleton

again has pushed back the date of her federal murder trial.

Crowe, 23, faces a charge of first-degree murder in the stabbing death of Richard Higheagle, 38, at his residence on the Umatilla Indian Reservation near Pendleton. Federal court records show Magistrate Judge Michael H. Simon on July 18 granted the defense request to push back her five-day trial in federal court in Portland from starting Aug. 1 to Nov. 29.

Umatilla Tribal Police on Sept. 29, 2021, at approximately 7:40 p.m. responded to 49 Willow Drive on the Umatilla Indian Reservation and found Richard Higheagle, 38, who had a stab wound in his chest. He died at a hospital about an hour after police found him.

According to court records, Crowe that night drove herself to the Umatilla Tribal Police Department, where she told FBI Special Agent Rex Shark she stabbed Higheagle with a kitchen knife and "admitted that she intended to kill him," but said she was "remorseful that she had killed him."

Crowe claimed she had lived under Higheagle's roof while he was married to her mother and he had sexually abused her through grade school and middle school, and said he also abused her sister until she was 16. Crowe has pleaded not guilty.

This is the third time Crowe has postponed the trial; the state has not opposed any of the motions to continue. Court records also show she has agreed to a conditional release from jail.

Hermiston students win bikes for reading

East Oregonian

HERMISTON — There are a fair number of Hermiston youths who are pedaling through their neighborhoods on new bicycles thanks to a program that also encouraged them to read.

Miranda Hunt, a librarian with the Hermiston School District, said the district partnered with the Hermiston Masonic Lodge No. 138 on the program. It is, she said, a partnership that has existed for several years.

"Each year, the Masons donate five bikes to each elementary school," she said. "At the end of the school year, we award the kids the bikes based on a reading competition."

The bicycles went to second through fifth graders, as done in previous years.

Hunt credited fellow librarian Alyxandra Rowe for adding a bit more fun to this year's contest. Rowe, Hunt said, organized a scavenger hunt that was part of the reading contest. Students were tasked with finding books, reading them and then taking comprehension



Miranda Hunt/Contributed Photo
Colette Westing, a second grader at Sunset Elementary School, Hermiston, stands with members of Hermiston Masonic Lodge No. 138 after they presented her with the bicycle she won earlier this month for participating in the annual Bikes for Books program, which the Masons sponsor.

tests on the books.

When the schoolchildren passed reading tests, they entered their names into drawings for free bicycles.

In total, according to Hunt, a couple hundred students were involved in the contest. Each of the winners, she added, each read at least four books.

Hunt spoke of the generosity of the Masons, but she added they were not alone in their kindness. The Hermiston Police Department, too, helped out, she said, as the police donated money for bicycles helmets.

"Every kid who won not only got a bike, they got a helmet as well," Hunt said. "We not only promoted reading, but safety, too."

The librarian called the competition a success, and she said it will be done again next spring.

M-F house fire displaces two residents

Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — A home was destroyed but nobody was injured Thursday morning, July 21, in a house fire in the 300 block of Ward Street in Milton-Freewater.

The fire displaced two residents, according to City Manager Linda Hall.

Firefighters arrived less than a minute after the report of the fire at 7:10 a.m., the house already was about 80% engulfed by flames, Hall said.

The cause of the fire is under investigation, she said.



Greg Lehman/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin
Using an infrared thermometer to find hot spots, Milton-Freewater Fire Department firefighters work on a house fire Thursday morning, July 21, 2022, on the 900 block of Ward Street, Milton-Freewater.

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