

Local early childhood development idea earns Alexander Award

A conversation between two Wallowa County mothers that began at a kitchen table as 2-year-olds played nearby has blossomed into a collaboration that recently garnered a prestigious award.

Six years after that conversation, those two mothers — Building Healthy Families Executive Director Maria Weer and Dr. Liz Powers, M.D. of Winding Waters Medical Clinic — are building better connections between health and early learning for local children.

On April 12, the nonprofit Children's Institute recognized the duo with the Alexander Award. The Children's Institute is an early learning advocacy organization based in Portland. The award is given to individuals or groups that are exemplary in making a difference in young children's lives in Oregon.

It's the fourth annual Alexander Award, but the first time it was given to two nonprofit organizations working together on behalf of children.



Courtesy photos

Dr. Liz Powers confers with a mother and her children at Winding Waters Clinic.

Programs the Wallowa County collaboration sparked include:

- The Well Baby Bag, containing children's books, literacy tips and information on developmental milestones. The bag is assembled by Building Healthy Families and handed out free to every parent who goes to Winding Waters Clinic for a well-baby check.
- Developmental screenings and intervention: Building Healthy Families assembles the kits containing materials and in-

struction for developmentally appropriate and supportive activities for families to do at home; the clinic hands them out to the kids and families who will most benefit by them..

• Reach out and Read, a national early literacy model in which Winding Waters Clinic providers are helping to provide new books to children and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud.

- Parenting education that

ranges from parenting education opportunities to home visits through Healthy Families Oregon.

Before the collaboration began, Powers estimated that about 30 percent of the clinic's young parents were getting developmental screenings. Six months after the partnership began that figure grew to 85 percent.

The greatest benefit, according to Powers, is that she can introduce pregnant mothers to Building Healthy Families even before their babies are born.

Dr. Dana Suskind, professor of surgery and pediatrics at the University of Chicago Medicine, was the keynote speaker at the awards ceremony. She told the audience that neuroscientists have revealed that 85 percent of brain development occurs in the first three years of life. Having access to assistance and science-based advice gives Wallowa County children the best possible start in their lives.

For more information about the Children's Institute, visit www.childinst.org.

Healthy Futures donations bring new scanner to hospital

By Scot Heisel

Wallowa County Chieftain

Last November when the Wallowa Valley Health Care Foundation held its 20th annual Healthy Futures Dinner Auction, generous residents of Wallowa County came together at Cloverleaf Hall in Enterprise and raised tens of thousands of dollars to bolster local health care.

Most of that money went toward fulfilling last year's goal of the purchase of a new bone density scanner for Wallowa Memorial Hospital — a cost of about \$50,000.

Today, when you visit the hospital's Imaging Department, you can see the fruits of that generosity.

Several times each week, imaging technicians make use of the new bone-density system, which



Scot Heisel/Wallowa County Chieftain

Wallowa Memorial's new bone density scanner.

produces a low-radiation X-ray to determine the mass and strength of bones. The system is vital in diagnosing and treating osteoporosis, a common condition that leads to

brittle bones that are extremely susceptible to breaks.

The new system was purchased to replace a previous one that was 13 years old and considered at the "end-of-life" stage, meaning parts and service were no longer available. Having a bone density system in place means patients don't need to travel to La Grande or farther for testing. And that's particularly important to patients who have brittle bones or are at risk for a major hip injury.

"This machine will also measure compression fractures, which is something we didn't have before," said Susy Lehr, registered bone density technician at Wallowa Memorial. "And it does FRAX ... a calculation of your chances of suffering a broken hip within a certain time frame."

And while the machine is useful for patients with osteoporosis,

which primarily affects elderly women, it is used to help treat patients of either sex. Like women, men also suffer from loss of bone density and are at risk of major hip injury.

"One in every two women is affected by it," said Director of Imaging Sarah Johnson during the Healthy Futures event in November. "And one in every four men. It's a common misconception that it only affects women. That's not the case."

"Usually it's menopausal women age 50 and above and also men at the age of 60 and above," Lehr said.

Bottom line: the new system provides improved diagnostics for the hospital's staff, which helps them better serve patients at risk.

"It's better quality and more continuity of care," Johnson said.