

Santa making visit to Florence Justic Center

The Florence Police Auxiliary will host its annual Meet Santa at the Florence Justice Center, located at Ninth and Greenwood streets, on Saturday, Dec. 15, from 3 to 5 p.m. Children will be able to select a toy and have their picture taken with Santa. The auxiliary is asking for community toy donations, unwrapped, for all ages. Gifts can be dropped off between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, at the Justice Center before Dec. 14.

Heartfelt House to open in June at RiverBend



COURTESY IMAGES

Architectual images (above, below) of the Heartfelt House, which is currently under construction at RiverBend Hospital, is scheduled to be completed this June, making 10 rooms available at minimal or no cost to families with family members receiving longer treatment at PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Medical Centers at RiverBend or University District.

As they celebrate Thanksgiving this week, families from as far away as Benton, Douglas and Coos counties say they're grateful for the Heartfelt House, which is under construction on the RiverBend campus. The 20,208-square-foot house is slated to open in June. It will be a home away from home for out-of-town patients needing treatments in Eugene-Springfield and families of patients who require long stays at PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Medical Centers at RiverBend or University District. The Heartfelt House will have 20 rooms: a 10-room wing for families of pediatric patients and a 10-room wing for families of adult patients. "It's one of the best things that could happen to RiverBend," said Heather Swesso, a Sutherlin resident whose two daughters were born prematurely, requiring stays in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Her youngest, Paisley, born at 30 weeks, spent 78 days in the NICU at RiverBend after her birth in January 2016. Swesso said she was lucky to be able to stay at her aunt's house in Springfield during that time. But even the short drive from her aunt's house to the hospital felt too long for the new mom eager to check on her fragile newborn. When the Heartfelt House is completed, visiting a loved one will be as simple as a 5-minute walk across the street, "It's going to put so many peoples' minds at ease because they're going to be able to be right there," Swesso said. The Heartfelt House is a \$8.4-million project funded entirely through philanthropy. It is a collaboration between PeaceHealth, which will own the land and building, and Ronald McDonald House Charities, which will oversee day-to-day operations. Guests will pay from nothing to a modest fee, depending on their circumstances. But no one will be turned away because of inability to pay. That lessens the financial blow to families who already are dealing with the stress of illness, injury or other medical conditions. Following a diagnosis of prostate cancer and surgery in June, Larry Wood, of North Bend, needed 40 radiation treatments over eight weeks. He wanted to have the treatments in the Eugene-Springfield area. But he couldn't



commute from North Bend and the cost to stay in a hotel for two months — even at a discounted rate — was prohibitive. Wood ended up staying at the Children's Miracle Network/Lions Patient Family Guest House on Patterson Street, near University District. "It was really nice," Wood said. "They provide just about everything a hotel provides. You could do your own laundry. You share the kitchen. It's kind of a family." Wood said he's glad to hear that the Heartfelt House will have room for even more families. The Heartfelt House anticipates serving up to 1,500 families a year, much more than the 300 a year the Patterson Street House could accommodate. Dave and Sarah Hokama, of Corvallis, have been dedicated advocates for the Heartfelt House after their youngest daughter, Gracie, was born 13 weeks early at RiverBend in November 2015. Sarah stayed at the Patterson Street guest house during Gracie's three months in the NICU. She said she wished she had been closer, so she could have spent more time at Gracie's side. "It's exciting to be part of this, to see the pieces come together, and to think of the future families who will benefit from this," she said after a recent tour of the Heartfelt House construction.

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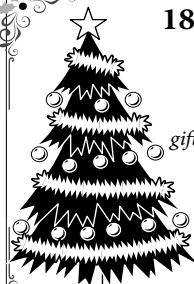
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