

Rodgers joins the neighborhood

New administrator finds his way to Dallas' Salem Health West Valley Hospital

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — Believe it or not, but it was Portland's weather that helped sell Bruce Rodgers on moving to Oregon.

OK, so it was July, and the other option was Seattle, which was in the midst of a balmy stretch of 55-degree, cloudy weather at the time.

Finding clear skies and warm temperatures in the Rose City was just one piece of perfect timing that drew the new Salem Health West Valley (formerly West Valley Hospital) chief administrative officer to the state more than 20 years ago.

The other was an odd coincidence.

Rodgers was looking for a new place to call home and a friend sug-

gested checking out Portland, calling it "a cool town."

He drove up and stayed for a day.

About an hour before leaving for Seattle, Rodgers heard a familiar laugh while waiting for the Max. Glancing around, he noticed a man that looked like a friend of his brother's, but he dismissed the idea.

"I can't imagine why

he would be in Portland," Rodgers recalled. But "sure enough, he and his wife had just moved to Portland five days before. They just happened to be downtown and we just ran into each other. I was probably an hour away from going up to Seattle. But then they said — it was just me and my dog at the time — hey, come

move here. We have a place for your dog."

Rodgers made the trip to Seattle, but accepted the invitation to West Valley and settled in — even becoming a big Portland Trail Blazers fan along the way.

Rodgers stepped in as administrator at West Valley on Feb. 22, taking over for Jim Sapienza, who left the post in early February. He's taking over at a

time of transition for West Valley.

It has a new name and a new attachment with Oregon Health & Science University through its partnership with Salem Health.

"We are in a strong place at West Valley and we want to continue to be strong and be available and be here as a service to the community," Rodgers said. See **RODGERS, Page 13A**

IN YOUR TOWN

DALLAS

A Dallas couple feels the Luck of the Irish after winning the Oregon Lottery's St. Patrick's Day raffle.

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FALLS CITY

Falls City School District will host an informational meeting about the bond to build a new gym at the elementary school.

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MONMOUTH

Students show off their artistic skills during the Ash Creek Art's Center art camp.

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INDEPENDENCE

The Independence farmers markets are set to return on Saturday.

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SPORTS

Dallas junior Harrison Broadus takes aim at league's best javelin throwers.

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EDUCATION

Students, parents and staff worked together to dig out a play structure at Monmouth Elementary School.

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Public invited to join Pinwheels for Prevention

Itemizer-Observer staff report

DALLAS — Polk County and Family Building Blocks will mark Child Abuse Prevention Month on Monday by taking part in the Pinwheels for Prevention.

The campaign, put on by Prevent Child Abuse Oregon, will take place at 12:15 p.m. at the steps of the Courthouse, 850 Main St., Dallas.

A pinwheel garden will be planted and Judge Sally Avera and District Attorney Aaron Felton will speak about child abuse in Polk County. A walk through downtown Dallas will follow. The public is encouraged to wear blue.

For more information: www.polkio.com.



Feliciano Mata, Marcos Puente and Eric Penalosa fill out applications at the Polk County Job Fair, held March 23 at Central High School.

OPTIMISTIC ABOUT ECONOMY

Local officials see Polk County's job market, labor force growing

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — In Chelsea Metcalfe's opinion, Dallas has a "good problem."

Metcalfe, the executive director of the Dallas Area Chamber of Commerce, said she's been trying to help a local family fulfill their business dream, but has run into a roadblock.

It's not their business plan, nor a perceived lack of customer base in Dallas. It's something Metcalfe can't recall happening in the nearly 15 years she's worked in Dallas.

"I've got a deli-bakery person who wants to come in. It's their dream to own their business in a small community," Metcalfe said. "They moved here a couple of years ago, they fell in love with it, but we can't find a space for them that works. That's where it's a good, bad thing."

She said outside some of the prominent Main Street vacancies — such as the old Ray's Hardware store — re-

tail spaces in Dallas are filling up.

"As far as storefronts go and availability for a small business, we don't have much to offer them, which is a good problem to have, but it is a problem we have," Metcalfe said.

That conundrum is a symptom of what appears to be brewing in Polk County's economy.

Optimism reigns

After a long slog through the Great Recession and the prolonged recovery, the region seems to be catching its breath. When asked about the state of the economy, many local officials and economic development experts are using the same word: optimism.

"Everyone that we've talked to, most of the people we have had contact with — folks on the economic development commission, are all pretty optimistic," said Jason Locke, Dallas' economic development director.

Economic new potential in Dallas has settled on the



OUR ECONOMY

bright side as of late. While still a work in progress, American Gas & Technology is projecting jobs into the hundreds at its newly purchased facility in Dallas.

Plans for the Blue Garden building now being restored by owner Bob Collins have generated plenty of excitement, too.

"It was pretty much considered a hopeless case, but there was a lot of effort put into that," Locke said. "Hopefully this gets people to understand that there is value, and it's worthwhile to bring these buildings back."

On the construction side, Locke said the city has seen a constant flow of development applications.

"That is a precursor of

things to come a year or two down the road," Locke said. "From the builders and developers standpoint, things are looking really good a year or two out as well as in the present."

In Monmouth, the major employers — Western Oregon University and Partnerships in Community Living Inc. — are providing a stable base.

"We're primarily a commuter county," said Monmouth City Manager Scott McClure. "Seventy-five percent of Monmouth people work outside of Polk County."

He said the "local economy" for Monmouth actually is Salem and Corvallis, for the most part.

McClure said Monmouth has essentially run out of space to grow in both commercial and residential zones and has a limited supply of available storefronts.

The city is working to solve that with an urban growth boundary expansion.

"We've done most of the

housing inventory work," McClure said. "We know what we need (and) how much we need."

FCR's call center opened in 2015 and has brought an estimated 100 jobs to Independence, taking advantage of high-speed fiber provided by Monmouth Independence Network.

In downtown Independence, the Cooper Building renovation holds not only the possibility of pulling in new businesses, but is inspiring other owners to improve their buildings.

Bigger potential exists in the development on the riverfront at the former Valley Concrete site.

Shawn Irvine, the economic development director for Independence, said the project holds implications for the success of downtown.

"(The gravel site) has been in our plans for 20 years to develop that," Irvine said. "The opportunity came up and we jumped on it."

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