

THE ECONOMICS OF COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

Concern, challenges and collaboration

Area hospitals bind services, resources

By Luke Whittaker
EO Media Group

Two Clatsop County health care heavyweights weighed in Wednesday night, March 22, at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center. It wasn't a boxing match, instead it was an evening of celebration, collaboration and a little uncertainty at the fifth-annual Clatsop Economic Development Resources business awards, where keynote speakers Erik Thorsen, CEO of Columbia Memorial Hospital, and Kendall Sawa, CEO of Providence Seaside Hospital, discussed the current state of affairs at their hospitals.

Rising health care costs and staffing struggles are among the chief concerns facing rural hospitals. Despite having 600 employees — the second most in Clatsop County — Thorsen is calling for more staff to address a growing need.

"We see about 28,000 emergency room and urgent care visits a year, that's about 80 people a day," he said.

Sawa said, "I think that's a sign of the need for more primary care physicians in our community." Decreasing reimbursement and rising health-care and pharmaceutical costs are plaguing Providence Seaside Hospital.

"It's a challenging reimbursement environment right now," he said. While the coast is a desirable destination to visit, enticing and retaining employees at a rural hospital is another hurdle for both hospitals.

"We continue to have challenges with recruiting providers to our coast," Sawa said.

"We're hopeful. It's a great place to live and be." Despite the staff shortages, Sawa doesn't anticipate any changes, but positions in primary care have been particularly needed.



Approximately 160 people representing various Clatsop County businesses attended the event held at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center.



Keynote speakers Kendall Sawa, CEO of Seaside Providence Hospital, and Erik Thorsen, CEO of Columbia Memorial Hospital.

"We'll continue to plug at it and make sure we'll continue access to care for our communities," he said.

Potential changes

Attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act by the Trump administration have raised concerns about potential changes to healthcare coverage.

"We're concerned — concerned with not really knowing what the future design is going to be, but we're sure watching it very closely," Sawa said.

"I'm confident we'll be able to manage any decision that's made." Changes in Medicaid are also possible, particularly with coordinated care programs.

'WE SEE ABOUT 28,000 EMERGENCY ROOM AND URGENT CARE VISITS A YEAR. THAT'S ABOUT 80 PEOPLE A DAY.'

Erik Thorsen, CEO of Columbia Memorial Hospital

Thorsen added, "I'm hoping that the current rhetoric at the federal level does not affect our state's ability to continue the CCO model.

"It is a potential that's out there, but hopefully it won't."

Collaboration and consolidation

A major issue for area hospitals has been an influx of mental health patients ending up in emergency rooms.

"In early 2016, we really started to talk about the behavior health crises that exists in our community and we partnered together to start a coalition," Thorsen said. In 2016, a collaboration of local

health care providers purchased a house in Warrenton and converted it into a crisis respite center.

"They might be waiting for a mental health bed to open up in Portland, and they end up waiting in the emergency room," Thorsen said.

"It's the wrong place — and the most costly place for a person to wait."

Providence Seaside and CMH have consolidated and reshuffled resources to better streamline their services.

"CMH made the difficult decision to close their home health and allow Providence to assume their patient load," Thorsen said. "The decision was made to make the best

use of our resources." Columbia Memorial's Lower Columbia Hospice, meanwhile, provides hospice care for the entire county.

"We worked and collaborated to make sure we have strong programs by each of our organizations and we've seen a lot of success," he said.

The two hospitals have also combined resources by conducting joint community needs assessments rather than doing them individually, which had been costly and duplicative.

Since 2012, hospitals and behavioral health organizations across Tillamook, Clatsop and Columbia County hospitals have been convening to share ideas on how to improve care in the community.

"The first thing was getting us all in a room and getting to talk about how we can improve care," Thorsen said.

"The key point is bringing the organizations together in a collaborative way to start to break down barriers that have existed and potentially driven up the cost at a lesser quality."

Improved imaging

New technology will allow doctors to diagnose breast cancer more successfully in Seaside.

"We recently purchased a tomosynthesis, which is a new way to do breast mammography," Sawa said.

"It prevents the chance of false negatives, so less chance of error." The new advanced imaging technology will be unveiled the first week of April and is "the only one on the coast" according to Sawa. The next closest is in Portland.

Meanwhile, the new, two-story, 18,000-square-foot state-of-the-art cancer treatment center in Astoria is projected to open next fall.

"We currently run medical oncology on our campus, but this will bring radiation and allow us to expand our program," with Oregon Health & Science University, Thorsen said.

Four Cannon Beach businesses take home economic development awards

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"We take our reputation in the community seriously."

As a much newer business to Cannon Beach, Pelican Pub and Brewing CEO Jim Prinzing said he was honored to be recognized so soon after opening in May 2016 for job creation.

"One of the things we enjoy as a company is creating living wage jobs that people can support their families with. Jobs where people can raise their kids," Prinzing said.

During construction, Prinzing hired all local contractors and employees around 85 employees during the summer season.

Pelican Brewing is one of the fastest growing breweries in the state, according to the Oregon State Liquor Control Commission 2016 beer report. He said he hopes to keep looking for new ways to invest in the community as they continue to grow as a business.

But for Steve Sinkler, the owner of The Wine Shack and Provisions 124, his award

for small business entrepreneurship inspired him to keep making The Wine Shack — a 40-year-old business — fresh and relevant.

"My reaction was disbelief, and a sense of awe and appreciation. When you are in the thick of it, you don't think people are watching what you're doing, but they are," he said.

In the past two years, Sinkler opened Provision 124, a fine cheese and bread charcuterie of sorts, to accompany The Wine Shack, as well as investing in continued reno-

vation. In the future, he hopes to expand Provision 124 with more products and services, as well as continuing to find new ways to keep the customer interested.

"These changes keep revitalizing a community. You don't want the customers to feel tired," he said. "I think what makes Cannon Beach special is that there are a lot of forward thinking business owners, and the CEDR awards committee recognizes there a lot of good things happening in Cannon Beach."



Building to house Cannon Beach Academy at 171 Sunset Boulevard.

Contract says Academy needs more students

Academy from Page 1A

District requires at least 17 kindergarten students and 17 students combined in first and second grade to be enrolled by May 1. If that threshold is not reached, it is possible the school would not be allowed to open in the fall.

As of April 3, only 12 kindergarten students and eight first- and second-graders have signed up.

"When we started this process many years back, a lot of families applied," Phil Simmons, the director of start-up operations for the academy, said. "But in that time families have moved, so it will be a challenge to get the minimum required."

Simmons is still optimistic about reaching this goal. As a charter school, any child in the region can enroll. Marketing materials have been circulated at Seaside Heights elementary and Gearhart elementary schools, helping spread the word.

"We have had various hurdles throughout this process, and every time the seemingly impossible became plausible," Simmons said.

There are three separate, two-month-long enrollment periods in which students can enroll. In the future, the system

would work in such a way that as long as 22 or fewer applications were submitted in the first period a student would be enrolled. But at any time in any stage there were more applications than spots, it would be open to a lottery system, which does not guarantee enrollment for each applicant.

"We are encouraging people to enroll as soon as possible, because in the future it is possible you could not get in during a later enrollment period," he said.

Seaside Superintendent Sheila Roley said the district will continue to provide support to the academy. The school's permit to have a charter school lasts three years, Roley said, which means they have until then to open the school before needing to re-apply.

"The academy has worked very hard to put together a program and we'll see how it comes together," Roley said.

By May 1, the board of directors hopes to have the school director hired, Simmons said. The board is also awaiting a permit to be granted by the city to start construction on their property on Sunset Boulevard. The board is also in the process of advertising for teaching positions.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

CEDR Board Vice President Alisa Dunlap presents an award to John Nelson of Coaster Construction.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Kristin Talamantez, CEDR board president, with award-winner Steve Sinkler of The Wine Shack.