

## Morrow County Health expands services



Pictured left to right Laura Burnside-McElligott, R.N. program director, Sheree Smith, R.N. health nurse and Betty Marquardt, secretary-clerk.

The Morrow County Health Department is growing, so much that between new and existing programs, conferences, travel and a mountain of paperwork, the four who staff the office barely have time to catch their breath.

Laura Burnside-McElligott, R.N., is director of the program. Sheree Smith, R.N. is full time health nurse; Betty Marquardt is secretary/clerk; and Gaelynn Cavillo is translator in the Boardman-Irrigon area.

Marquardt says that the increased workload at the public health department is four-fold: an increase in programs offered, an increase in population, especially in the north end of the county, a change in population (more low income and migrant workers); and an increase in bookkeeping requirements by the government.

"There are a lot of people who

fall through the cracks," said Marquardt. "Some people make too much money to qualify for welfare, but not enough to take care of themselves. It has changed a great deal. I'm not sure that it has really changed as much as it seems, or we just weren't aware of it before."

The health department doesn't just give shots and check blood pressures anymore, as vital as those programs are. The department also administers programs in perinatal and infant care communicable diseases, sexually transmitted diseases and family planning.

Smith spends the majority of her time screening babies and helping mothers and babies get access to the programs they need. The High Risk Infant/Babies First program is targeted at babies who had problems prenatally or at

delivery or who have physical, social or nutritional problems, and babies who are born to very young mothers. "I also look at the interaction between the parent and child," said Smith.

Smith routinely visits babies and mothers at their homes and assesses the babies in terms of nutrition, elimination, activity level, developmental level, physical growth, vision and hearing. If she spots a problem she may rescreen the child at a later date or may refer the mom to a program where she can get help.

Smith logs a lot of miles in the Boardman-Irrigon area and sees a lot of low-income families. She stresses, however, that income has "absolutely no bearing on participation in the program." Although the majority of her clients are Hispanic, who often may not have family in the area to help out, she says the proportion of Hispanic families is not as great as she once thought.

"I see myself as an advocate for families," says Smith. "I feel that we have made an impact. With visits and follow-up, we encourage them to do things (for the benefit of the child) that they wouldn't otherwise have been able to do." Smith emphasizes that participation in the program is entirely on a volunteer basis and families may reject the help that the department offers. But, she adds, only one family, out of the 31 families she has visited this past year, has turned down her assistance. Some families are referred by doctors or nurses, some by friends or family and some seek assistance themselves.

Burnside-McElligott says that one goal of the department is to eventually be able to visit the home of every baby born in Morrow County. In 1991, out of a population of 7,800 there were 118 births. Twenty-three of those births were to girls 15-19 years old and 16 were to unwed mothers.

As public health authority, Burnside-McElligott's job is to assess the health of the entire county and then directly, or through other services, try to maintain the health of the people. This includes investigating reportable diseases, identifying the causes of the diseases, and then working on management and prevention. "I need to make sure the system is in place," she says, "so people can get care. Burnside-McElligott says that many people, the migrant community, the working poor and Hispanics—have trouble getting health care. "Our goal is to make sure that there is access to health care and prenatal care for everyone in the county."

Some of the pieces needed to attain that goal, however, are missing. More primary care is needed in the Boardman-Irrigon area (Boardman has only one physician and Irrigon has none); more prenatal care is needed county-wide; and environmental health care is extremely limited. Currently the Oregon Health Division has one sanitarian based in Pendleton to serve 11 eastern counties. Environmental health care usually involves a sanitary engineer who inspects

drinking water and sewer systems, restaurants and community events for food safety and indoor and outdoor air quality.

"All it would take for a big outbreak would be one person infected with hepatitis A handling food at Fair and Rodeo, St. Patrick's weekend or the Fourth of July, for example," she said. The health department is also involved in emergency management planning in the event of an accident at the Army Depot as they plan to demolish the nerve gas stored there or on the freeway involving a truck hauling gas, pesticide or radioactive waste, for example.

Other areas of major concern to Burnside-McElligott are family planning teenage pregnancies and the control of sexually transmitted diseases.

"The only prevention that works 100 percent of the time is abstinence, or a totally monogamous lifetime relationship," cautions Burnside-McElligott. She says that the department promotes abstinence and teaches about the physical, emotional and social consequences of sexual behavior. Early intercourse and multiple partners predispose a young woman to cervical cancer, she says, in addition to increasing the risk of pregnancy, AIDS, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital warts, genital herpes, chlamydia and infertility. "Some kids also don't realize that there are emotional, social and more consequences, too," she adds. "We want to assist a person in family planning so they are able to have a family when they want to."

Burnside-McElligott is emphatic in stressing that teenagers do not need their parents' permission to obtain birth control from the Public Health Department. "We do work with the teen to be abstinent and to involve their parents and partners if possible," she said. "We will give condoms to anyone who walks in and wants them," she says. "Condoms should be used by everyone who is sexually active."

"Confidentiality is absolute," added Burnside-McElligott. "If they don't wish to tell anyone, no one will ever know. We never tell why people come in to the office."

In addition to providing condoms, the department assists in obtaining other methods of birth control and provides free pregnancy tests. A doctor's prescription is required for some methods of birth control, but the health department will arrange for a doctor's exam and will accompany people to the exam if they wish. Injections of DepoProvera, one birth control method, are given at the health department. An injection of DepoProvera prevents ovulation for three months. Counseling, an initial exam and yearly exams are required for this type of birth control. Another method, Norplant, which is inserted under the skin and provides birth control for a year, is available through family planning on a limited basis. The device may be inserted at the Pioneer Memorial Clinic. This birth control method also requires

counseling and an exam.

Testing for HIV, the AIDS virus, is also provided at the department and can be strictly anonymous. The department uses a name (not necessarily the person's own) given by the person seeking the testing, and gives results by number. Counseling is mandatory for AIDS testing. Tests for other sexually transmitted diseases must be obtained at a doctor's office or clinic.

Burnside-McElligott, who became public health nurse 2½ years ago after the retirement of Pat Wright, former public health nurse, has a bachelor of science degree in nursing from Washington State University at Pullman and Spokane through their intercollegiate nursing program. Prior to being named public health nurse, Burnside-McElligott had been employed at Good Shepherd Hospital in Hermiston since 1988, at Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland for a year and a half and at Pioneer Memorial Hospital at Heppner for four years. She and her husband, Tom, have six children and live in Heppner.

Smith, who received a nursing diploma from Good Samaritan School of Nursing at Portland in 1981, started working part time with the department in August of 1991 and full time in July of 1992. Before taking the full time position she also worked as an R.N. at Pioneer Memorial Hospital and at Good Shepherd Community Hospital for about a year. Smith and her husband, Bob, have three children and live outside Lexington.

Marquardt, also of Lexington

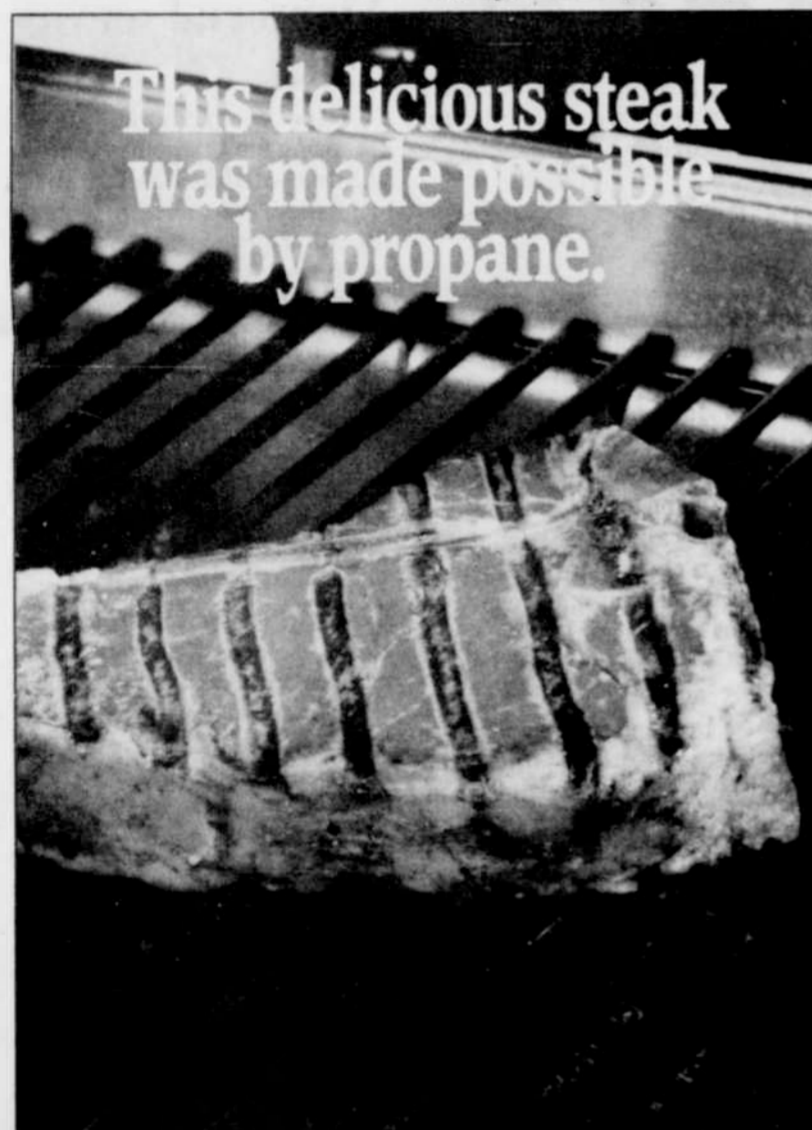
has worked for the department for 16 years, 13 ½ of those with Pat Wright. Marquardt handles record-keeping and correspondence for the immunization program and billing for Medicaid for the family planning, maternity case management and High Risk Infant/Babies First programs. Before the health department expanded its programs, Marquardt often accompanied Wright on home visits. Marquardt has eight grown children and 16 grandchildren.

Cavillo, Boardman, has worked as a translator for the health department for approximately one year. Plans are to expand Cavillo's position with the health department in immunizations outreach work in north Morrow County. Cavillo and her husband Flavio, have three children.

The health department will move into the Pioneer Memorial Clinic when the addition, now under construction, is completed. The move will give the department better access to exam and counseling rooms and will facilitate patients' visits with the physicians.

The health department in Heppner is now located at 471 N. Main, across from the Heppner City Park. Hours are Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to noon and 1-4:30 p.m. and when the clinic sign says open. Irrigon clinic hours are the second and fourth Tuesdays from 1-4 p.m. at the county annex building. Boardman clinic hours are the first and third Tuesdays from 1:30-4 p.m. at Boardman City Hall.

For more information call the Morrow County Health Department 676-5421.



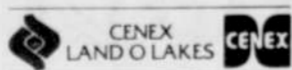
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## Local citizens receive awards

The Morrow/Umatilla Transition Council held its annual employer/employee recognition night at Hermiston High School May 6.

Kathy Tellechea, Heppner Day Care was recognized as an employer.

Others recognized were mentors: Liz Grabeel, Red Apple Market, Madora Rill Heppner

High School, Ed Gunderson, Summer Youth Coordinator Forest Service and Ivan Lorenz, Forest Service.

Cindi Parcel and Lynn Setness both Heppner Day Care and Levi Connor, Hermiston High School and Mike Lovgren, CAPECO Corp. were all recognized as employees.

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