

MCHD healthier, but not recovered

The Morrow County Health District is still ailing financially, but the patient is making a comeback and no longer appears to be on its deathbed.

Interim MCHD interim CEO Sheila Dahlman presented a much healthier outlook for the district at the MCHD regular monthly meeting held Dec. 7 in Heppner.

The district ended up \$85,353 in the black for the month ending October 31. However, Dahlman cautioned the board that the rosy financial picture was in part due to the sale of the dental clinic which had been owned by the district and the receipt of the district's taxes.

Dahlman estimated that the district would have lost around \$16,000 for the month, significantly less than the losses in previous months. "Even though it's a loss, it's headed in the right direction," said Dahlman.

Gross patient revenues for the month of October amounted to \$319,434. After deductions for bad debts, contractual adjustments and charity amounting to \$26,659, and additional operating revenue of \$955, the district had a total operating revenue of \$293,730.

The additional income of taxes (around \$47,000) and sale of the dental offices amounted to \$146,102. Total operating expenses for October were \$354,479.

Broken down by clinics for the month ending Oct. 31: Pioneer Memorial Clinic had total revenues of \$30,572 and expenses of \$32,030, for a loss of \$1,458; the Boardman clinic had total revenues of \$10,467 and expenses of \$14,846, for a loss of \$4,379; the Irrigon clinic had no revenue for the month since it just began operation, and expenses of \$5,422.

Dahlman said that the nursing home now has 17 patients and the month of November had a high hospital census.

Gerald Moro of Barnett & Moro, P.C., Certified Public Accountants, who was on hand to present the financial statement and independent auditors' report, said that the district has had problems, particularly the loss of doctors and three administrators over the past year, but added that the hospital has the support of the community and is, he believes, a viable operation.

In other business, the board: -heard a report from Dahlman on the nursing shortage in the western states and the difficulty the hospital has had recruiting and maintaining nursing staff. The board voted to contract with a company which would provide temporary nurses and also approved incentives of up to \$3,000 for relocation expenses and up to \$1,500 for incentives for nurses signing on with the district and staying a specified amount of time.

-approved purchase of a training program in patient accounts, medical records and nursing of up to \$5,000.

-discussed the purchase of a computer for the Irrigon Clinic, which, says Dahlman, will become a necessity as soon as the Irrigon and Boardman clinics both begin full-time operation.

-discussed the purchase of a copier which will replace a failing one now at Pioneer Memorial Clinic. If purchased, a new high-volume copier would be installed at the hospital and the current hospital copier would be moved to the clinic.

-tabled until the January meeting a decision concerning the district's computer system. The current system was included in the contract with

Western Health. However, the agreement with WH has been terminated. WH is considering a proposal from MCHD that would allow MCHD to stay on the system for another year.

-discussed the possibility of purchasing a CAT scan machine. Doctor Clyde Burnham and Nurse Practitioner Wendy Haack, both of whom were at the meeting, voiced enthusiastic support of the purchase. According to estimates, the machines would "pay themselves off in six to 18 months" with patient fees and would allow for the retention of patients who are sent to other facilities for CAT scans. Purchase of the machine would be tied to a telemedicine program, which would send CAT scan results to specialists in other areas via computer. Dahlman and Haack said that grant monies are available to establish a telemedicine program.

-discussed purchase of new equipment for the laboratory, which, according to lab director Jay Straley, would save the

district money because it requires fewer expensive chemicals. The board agreed to pursue a contract for the machinery, but did not want to approve the purchase until hearing the report of a financial consultant, which is scheduled for Monday, Dec. 14, at 7 p.m. at Heppner High School and Tuesday, Dec. 15, at 6 p.m. at Riverside High School in Boardman.

-approved a resolution to hire the firm of Davis Wright Tremaine L.L.P. to handle matters concerning contract litigation.

-approved a resolution to hire the firm of Bullard, Korshoj, Smith & Jerstedt to represent the district in personnel and union matters.

-discussed the possibility of having a mobile MRI, a diagnostic machine, come to the area. The mobile MRI firm, which is out of Boise, would either do all of the scheduling and billing out of their office, with MCHD providing only the site for the mobile facility, or the firm would charge the district a flat fee and the district would, in turn, schedule and bill patients.

-approved airfare of around \$468 round trip for Dahlman to attend a rural health care conference in Georgetown, near Washington, D.C. Dahlman has received a scholarship which would pay for lodging and conference expenses.

-tentatively made an employment offer to physician assistant Sheridan Tarnasky. Tarnasky previously worked for the district as a nurse and nursing director before returning to school to pursue a career as a PA. If Tarnasky agrees to the contract, she would work five days a week-a half a day each day at both the Boardman and Irrigon clinics.

-approved a contract between MCHD and speech pathologist Patricia Leighton.

-approved a motion to pursue a contract with a social worker for the district.

-approved temporary medical staff privileges until the district can finish credentializing the staff and by-laws are approved.

-received a report concerning the number of patients seen at the various clinics in the district. Doctors and the nurse practitioner at Pioneer Memorial Clinic saw 612 patients in November, with 20 new patients; staff at the Irrigon Clinic saw 163 patients with 32 new patients; and the clinic in Boardman, which is not yet fully staffed, saw 47 patients, with 15 of those new to the clinic.

-received a report on monthly ambulance runs. The Heppner ambulance had 24 runs in November; the Boardman ambulance, 12; and the Irrigon ambulance, seven.

Consultant to present report

Michael Bell, consultant hired by the Pioneer Memorial Hospital Foundation to examine Morrow County Health District's financial situation, will present his report on Monday, December 14, at 7 p.m. at the Heppner High School cafeteria.

Sheila Dahlman, the district's interim CEO, will also be on the program. Results of the survey sponsored by the foundation will be presented.

The public is invited to attend and time will be provided for questions and comments.

A presentation will be held the following night, Tuesday, Dec. 15, at the Riverside High School auditorium beginning at 6 p.m.

Cabbage Hill conditions on ODOT website

Images from a new video camera mounted above Deadman Pass of Cabbage Hill between Pendleton and LaGrande are now displayed on the Oregon Department of Transportation website.

To see the image, which is updated every six minutes, go to the ODOT website address at www.odot.state.or.us and click on the "travel info" square in the upper left hand corner.

When the page opens, select "cameras" from the list on the right side or click on the camera icon on the left side of the screen. A map of Oregon, with icons marking all of the ODOT camera locations, will open. Click on the Cabbage Hill icon to see the local conditions.

The website contains other information about weather and road condition reports.

Open house set

The Morrow County Court announces the annual open house for the historic Gilliam and Bisbee Building on the corner of May and Main Streets, Heppner.

The Gilliam and Bisbee building was built in 1919 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Purchased by Morrow County in 1997, the building houses the Coast-to-Coast store and the offices of the Area Agency on Aging, Senior Services coordinator, Veterans Service officer and Headstart on the street level. The upper floor of the building is the home of the County's "Family Service Center" which includes the offices of Children and Families, Public Health, Behavioral Health and the Juvenile Department as well as the Oregon State University Extension Office. Anyone interested in viewing the interior of this building is invited to the open house scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 23.

Church plans program, service

The First Christian Church in Heppner will hold its children's Christmas program on Sunday, Dec. 20, at 6 p.m. at the church.

The Christmas Even candlelight service will be held Thursday, Dec. 24, beginning at 7 p.m.

Everyone is invited to attend.

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VOL. 117 NO. 49 8 Pages Wednesday, December 9, 1998 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Open house to mark 70 years in business for Peterson's Jewelers in Heppner

Peterson's Jewelers in Heppner, owned by Randall and Marlene Peterson, will celebrate its 70th anniversary with an open house this Saturday, Dec. 12. The store plans to give away door prizes, including a man's Black Hills Gold watch, a diamond and sapphire pendant and a pair of diamond earrings. Cake punch and coffee will be served from 2-4 p.m.

Peterson's Jeweler's was founded in 1928 by Randall's father, John Oscar Peterson. He had been working in Pomeroy, WA, up until he established the shop. He went back to Pomeroy to marry his wife, Bertha, and then returned with her to operate the store. J.O. started out his business with one necklace and six watches. His first sale was to Etta Parker's husband, former resident, who bought the necklace.

The elder Petersons first established their jewelry shop in the building once on the corner of Main and Center streets next to the bank of Eastern Oregon and then moved to the Fair Building. The Fair Building occupied the corner where Cal's Service Center was before its demolition this November. J.O. moved the store to its current location next to the Post Office on Main Street in Heppner in 1941 at the beginning of World War II. They held their grand opening on April 17, 1941. The store was expanded and remodeled in 1970.

Randall began working at the store when he was 10 years old, first learning watch and clock repair from his father. The store was open six days a week as it is now, but back then it was open until 9 p.m. Saturdays to accommodate farmers, ranchers and their hired hands who came to town. Saturday was a busy day, the day most of the watch repair work was brought in and picked up.

Randall apprenticed under his father, who was a master in the jewelry trade and noted for his engraving by hand with a sharp steel instrument before stainless steel was prevalent. Randall learned the trade, working at the family business during high school. After taking time to attend college at Whitman in Walla Walla and North Idaho College at Coeur d'Alene and completing a two year stint in the Army, Randall returned to Heppner to help his parents in the store.

J.O. passed away in 1960, staying active in the business until 1959, when Randall took over operation. Randall says he has no plans for retirement. "A



Marlene and Randall Peterson

lot of my classmates stop by and many have retired," says Randall. "But I don't think I would like it. I like to work and I like to keep busy."

Peterson's Jewelers won the Heppner Chamber of Commerce business of the year award in 1989 Marlene and Randall continue to offer 14



J.O. and Bertha Peterson



The Fair Building, home to Peterson's Jewelers for many years.

carat and costume jewelry, watches and clocks, china,

silver and flatware, gift items, clock, jewelry and watch repair, engraving, free ring cleaning, free gift wrapping, a wish list registry and a wedding registry

New DA sworn in



Incoming Morrow County District Attorney David C. Allen was sworn in last week by Morrow County Clerk Barbara Bloodsworth at the courthouse in Heppner.

DON'T MISS OUR OPEN HOUSE!
on Friday, December 11th • Refreshments provided!

FIND THE PERFECT GIFT
DURING OUR BIG CHRISTMAS SALE GOING ON NOW!

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