

Homeless:

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are the thousands of Oregonians who end up discretely sleeping in their car, in a garage or on a friend's couch for a few months at a time after not being able to afford rent.

"The hidden homeless move in and out of homelessness," Williams said. "They're always on the edge economically. One bad car repair or medical bill will put them over."

Scarcity of housing drives up prices and makes it hard to find a vacancy that will fit the renter's needs. The top two recommendations of the OCF report are increasing housing built at all price points and increasing the availability of affordable housing through vouchers, rent control and other methods.

Hermiston, Umatilla and Stanfield have been focused on tackling the housing problem in recent years. Several new subdivisions and a low-income apartment complex nearly complete on Sixth Street have been announced in Hermiston. Developers have been building new homes every month in Umatilla. In Stanfield, developers will break ground next spring on 40 new homes available to low-income residents.

Hermiston School District's liaison for homeless students, Lisa Depew, said a shortage of affordable housing in Hermiston is definitely a factor in displacing some local families. Some might end up living out of a van, while others "double up" in an apartment with another family.

"Affordable housing is a huge component of what some of our families are exposed to," she said.

Right now the district only has 13 students classified as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act — much lower than the 80 or so students who were on that list when Depew first



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

People gather for lunch at The Salvation Army on Emigrant Avenue in Pendleton on Friday. The Salvation Army serves a community lunch Monday through Saturday to those in need of a meal.

took over. She said definitions of homelessness have tightened over time, but whether a student officially meets the definition or not, there are plenty of "wrap-around" services available to students in need.

Bryn Browning, assistant superintendent of teaching and learning, said those services include making sure students have transportation to school and that they have whatever clothing, equipment and other supplies they need to fully participate in the classroom and in extracurricular activities.

The district also provides free breakfast to every student and free lunch to low-income students to make sure all students are having their nutrition needs met. Schools identify students who are going hungry on weekends and send home bags of food put together by the Agape House and local churches.

Resources

It's not just students who experience homelessness.

Both Pendleton and Hermiston have warming stations that offer a place

to sleep at night during below-freezing weather, but are lacking year-round accommodations.

"There's no shelter here for the homeless, and that's a real big need," said Major DeWayne Hallstad of the Pendleton Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army serves free lunch to homeless residents six days a week. Hallstad said there were 73 people at the meal on Thursday.

In Hermiston, meals, warm clothing and other resources are available at Desert Rose Ministries, 512 E Main St. in Hermiston.

Several churches also provide free meals to people in need, including the Hermiston Seventh-day Adventist Church (5:30-6:30 p.m. each Wednesday at 855 W. Highland Ave.), First Christian Church (11 a.m. on Mondays at 775 W. Highland Ave.), First United Methodist Church (11 a.m. Thursdays at 191 E. Gladys Ave.) and Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church (10:45 a.m. Fridays at 565 W. Hermiston Ave.).

The Hermiston Warming Station is also prepar-

ing to open this winter, with trainings for volunteers on Oct. 3 at 6:30 p.m. and Oct. 5 at 11 a.m. and Oct. 6 at 1 p.m. at the station, 1075 S. Highway 395.

Anyone who is homeless or at risk of being homeless is invited to a Project Community Connect and Veteran Stand Down event Oct. 12 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Hermiston Community Center, 415 S. Highway 395. It will include free resources, such as hygiene supplies, health screenings, haircuts, veterinary care and information on year-round services.

Chronic homelessness

The most difficult situations for communities to deal with are the chronic, unsheltered homeless — those who have been living on the streets for years. According to ECONorthwest, Oregon, Washington, California and Hawaii together hold more than half of the country's unsheltered homeless population.

And yet, Williams said, those four states are receiving significantly fewer federal funds for affordable housing than some states on the east side of the country.

"We need to figure out how to better get our share of federal funds," he said.

According to the report, Oregon represents 1.3% of the total U.S. population, but 5.6% of the country's chronically homeless who are sleeping outdoors.

Methods for counting homeless residents are imprecise. Annual "point in time" counts rely on volunteers hitting the streets to try to find as many self-reported homeless people as possible, in addition to organizations like warming stations taking a census of those who walk through their doors that month.

In 2018, Umatilla County organizations counted 511 homeless residents, 57% of which were located in Pendleton.

Burke:

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to rural communities have made him a sought-after speaker and panel member on rural healthcare issues," Eldridge said.

Burke said he will likely retire sometime between March and July of next year, staying on as CEO until the GSHCS board has been able to find a strong candidate and make the transition to new leadership.

He has overseen many transitions for Good Shepherd in the past, from adding new services and purchasing clinics to building multi-million dollar expansions of the medical campus on 11th Street.

The health care industry itself has also changed. Burke said the past three decades have seen major medical advancements and new technology introduced to the field. Providers coordinate care through electronically-shared records. Hospitals have identified best practices to keep patients healthy and are more regulated.

"Hospitals are safer," Burke said.

There have been challenges too. Increased reporting requirements have added demands on providers' time, as have more strenuous training requirements. Burke said the way hospitals are financed has undergone "dramatic" changes.

"In rural America, we're losing a rural hospital every month," he said.

While rural hospitals struggle to stay staffed and stay afloat financially, they have to balance the rising costs of health care for patients. Burke said the country needs to look at the "inputs" into health care that cause those costs to increase.

Those inputs include rising prescription drug prices, increased personnel costs driven by physician and nursing shortages, and increased regulations.

"Every time a new reg-

ulation comes out — well intended — there is rarely an accurate calculation of how much it will cost to implement it," Burke said.

During his time at Good Shepherd, Burke has testified on those issues before the Oregon Legislature and Congressional committees. He said he doesn't see the United States going to a socialized, single-payer health care system — something he's "not a fan of" — but the country does need to continue to create solutions for increasing the affordability and availability of health care.

While rural hospitals struggle to retain staff, Burke said Good Shepherd has been more successful in recruiting and retaining providers in recent years.

"Obviously that's a benefit to the community, that we're getting the number of physicians we need," he said. "For many years we didn't have nearly enough, and now it's getting better. We grow our own, and that's helped."

It also helps that Good Shepherd has been named one of The Oregonian's top workplaces in Oregon multiple times. Burke said there are many reasons Good Shepherd is a great place to work, but its people definitely top the list.

Burke said he hadn't necessarily intended to spend so much of his career in Hermiston, but the community became home and he has "deeply loved" the work.

"The job is challenging, but I have enjoyed it immensely," he said.

Burke got his start in the health care industry in the 1960s, when his father, a hospital administrator, hired him as a janitor. Burke encouraged young people to consider a job in health care, calling it a fulfilling experience.

"It's a career that's not going away," he said. "Even though we don't know what changes the future holds for the industry, people will still need care."



Meet Internal Medicine Physician Nu Nwe Tun, MD

Internal Medicine and Geriatrician physician, Nu Nwe Tun, MD, provides adult medicine for patients 18 and older, and specializes in managing the health, wellness and treatment of elderly patients. She is very comfortable treating simple and complex diseases; such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and respiratory disease.

"I'm committed to providing personalized care by focusing not simply on treatment but on the well-being of the whole patient as they age." -Dr. Tun

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