

Good Shepherd community meeting highlights patient care

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

When Marcus Engel took the stage during the Good Shepherd Community Health Care System Community Meeting on Wednesday night to talk about patient care, he was speaking from experience.

At age 18, Engel, who authors books and gives speeches nationwide about improving the patient experience, was coming home from a hockey game in St. Louis with his friends when a drunken driver crashed into the side of the vehicle in which he was a passenger. The crash broke every bone in his face and others throughout his body, took his eyesight, required a tracheotomy and resulted in hundreds of hours of surgeries.

He doesn't remember much from his arrival at the Level 1 trauma center 3 miles away, other than the intense pain, but he does remember Jennifer.

"Most of the night I was unconscious, and the only thing that gave me comfort in that messed up world was the fact that someone was holding my hand," Engel said.

Every time he had a moment of consciousness, she would squeeze his hand and repeat, "My name is Jennifer. You've been in a car accident. You're in the hospital."

"Then she would repeat two of the most compassionate words you can say: 'I'm here,'" he said.

That simple gesture meant the world to him. It eventually inspired him to start the "I'm Here Movement," encouraging medical professionals to remember the importance of comfort and reassurance in their interactions with patients.

"Simple human presence is the



Marcus Engel, with his guide dog Elliot, speaks at the Good Shepherd Health Care System Community Meeting at Hermiston High School on Wednesday.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell

cornerstone of caregiving," he said.

For the next 20 years, Engel didn't know who Jennifer was — her position with the hospital, her last name, or even if she was a real person and not a painkiller-induced hallucination. But when he finally returned to the hospital where he was a patient all those years ago, the hospital had a surprise for him: they had found Jennifer.

A video of their reunion in 2013 can be found at marcusengel.com/im-here-movement. Marcus found out that at the time of his crash

Jennifer was a 20-year-old emergency room technician, and had since worked her way up to clinical nurse manager of the surgical intensive care unit at the same hospital.

When Engel's beloved guide dog Garrett was ready to retire three years ago, it was Jennifer who adopted him.

During his presentation Engel talked about other experiences with people who participated in his care, both good and bad.

He also talked about his decision to change the things he could

in his life and stop worrying about the things that he couldn't. When his accident happened, he wondered why it happened to him, but he knows now that his experience has helped others.

"It's a huge compliment when people say, 'I sell tires for a living, but your book taught me so much about how to talk to people,'" he said.

Good Shepherd CEO Dennis Burke also spoke, sharing what the hospital has accomplished in the 2018-19 fiscal year and what it is planning for the near future.

In the past year Good Shepherd added the Good Shepherd Family Health Center; launched a new Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Center; expanded its home health and hospice services to the east side of Umatilla County; opened a wellness clinic at Hermiston High School; expanded its speech language and pathology department; opened a satellite pharmacy at Regency Hermiston Nursing & Rehabilitation Center; remodeled its diagnostic imaging and lab area; put a new roof on the hospital switched to the EPIC records system; increased urgent care to seven days a week; and recruited 12 new physicians and providers.

"This was a good year in terms of recruitment," Burke said.

The hospital isn't done recruiting, however. In the next year it will be looking for two OB-GYNs, two family practice doctors, one to three hospitalists, two psychiatrists and a non-interventional cardiologist. The hospital will also be recruiting a new CEO, as Burke plans to retire next spring.

"Dennis has been here 31 years — an exceptional CEO — and we wish him well," board chair Steve Eldridge said.

Burke shared some upcoming projects the hospital is also planning, including construction of a physical medicine and rehabilitation center that will focus on helping people manage pain in multiple ways, and an "industrial medicine" program focused on serving people at risk of health problems from industrial jobs.

Good Shepherd is also planning to start an oncology clinic and a sleep center, and expanding its cardio rehabilitation area.

Walker's Farm Kitchen closes

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Walker's Farm Kitchen has closed its doors for good.

The Hermiston restaurant first announced on Facebook that it would be closed October 21-November 4, and then on Sunday posted an announcement that the restaurant was permanently closed, effective immediately.

Larry and Cynthia Walker opened the farm-to-table restaurant in February 2013, serving up seasonally fresh, locally sourced dishes advertised as "an upscale menu without pretensions."

They garnered a steady flow of high praise on review websites such as Yelp, often from out-of-town customers who expressed surprise at finding such a "diamond in the rough" in Hermiston.

"Best meal out I've had in over a year, who would have thought that would happen in Hermiston," Nicole M. of Beaverton wrote on Yelp in August.

The rave reviews weren't enough to keep the lights on at the restaurant, however. The Walkers wrote on Sunday that in the past three years a busy night had become the exception rather than the rule.

"The chalkboard mar-



HH file photo

Walker's Farm Kitchen in Hermiston has closed its doors permanently.

quee lights up one last time with tears and a heavy heart as we deliver this message to you, and it is not a decision we made lightly or freely, but a decision forced upon us by declining revenues to the point where it became impossible to keep the doors open," they wrote.

Larry Walker declined to comment further when contacted, but the long Facebook message Sunday expressed gratitude for customers and staff who had played a part in the Walker's Farm Kitchen journey over the years, in some cases becoming close friends.

"Regardless of who you are, we enjoyed your company every time you stepped through the doorway," the Walkers wrote.

Rule change pushes immigrants to avoid free services

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

A Trump administration rule keeping recipients of public benefits from a green card is causing some immigrants to steer clear of needed services, according to members of Hermiston's Hispanic Advisory Committee.

In August, the administration announced a "public charge" rule allowing it to turn away legal immigrants applying for a green card (a step to citizenship) based on factors such as a lack of English proficiency, or legally accessing benefits like Medicaid or food stamps.

A judge temporarily blocked the rule in October before it took effect. But Jose Garcia, chair of the Hispanic Advisory Committee, said he is seeing people in the immigrant community refuse any sort of free services out of fear it might count against them in the path to citizenship.

"People don't even want to know about services — free health care, a flu shot. Everything free they are running from," he said.

The public charge rule would only count certain federal benefits against green card applicants. Many services in Hermiston, such as free screenings at the recent

Family Health Fair or free car seat checks at Umatilla Morrow County Head Start, would not be included. But Garcia said many people's attitude is that it's better to be safe than sorry.

Jonathan Lopez, another member of the Hispanic Advisory Committee, said a big part of HAC — whose meetings are always well-attended — is educating the local Hispanic community on things in the community that could help them. Now, he said, they're having to reassure people that accessing services, such as Hermiston's free bus system, won't put any noncitizen's chance at citizenship in jeopardy.

"We tell them they don't even ask any information, you just wait at the bus stop and they pick you up," he said.

Lopez, who is also running for county commissioner, said he expects fear will bleed into other things, causing immigrants to not participate in the U.S. Census that will determine how much federal funding local governments receive and whether Oregon will pick up an additional seat in the House of Representatives.

"Fear has driven them to miss out on opportunities," he said.

Manuel Gutierrez, a city councilor and liaison to the Hispanic Advisory Commit-

tee, said the key to countering that fear will be education. He has been explaining to people, for example, that if their children who are U.S. citizens are on the Oregon Health Plan or getting free lunch at school, that will not be counted against their parents who are not citizens yet.

If the temporary injunction on the rule is lifted, it will only count benefits accessed after the rule was instated, not before. And many benefits, such as Head Start and student loans, won't be included either.

"Some people get so scared and they believe what other people say and don't check the facts," Gutierrez said.

The phenomenon isn't unique to Hermiston. *The New York Times* reported that out of everyone in New York who was legally eligible to receive food stamps through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, non-citizens were withdrawing or refusing aid at twice the rate of citizens.

The rule is the subject of multiple lawsuits and faces a long legal battle between proponents who say America should only accept immigrants who can support themselves without help, and opponents who say screening immigrants based on wealth goes against the principles America was founded upon.

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