

Psychiatric hospital designed with patient safety in mind

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

When Eastern Oregon residents experience a severe mental health crisis, they will soon be able to receive inpatient treatment at a local facility designed to keep them as safe as possible.

At the new Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital in Hermiston, even the landscaping in the courtyard was given special thought.

“All of our plants out here are non-toxic and also edible, so if a patient were to try to eat them they would not be harmed,” Lifeways director Micaela Cathey said.

The hospital will start taking patients sometime in the first quarter of 2020, after it is fully staffed, but for now Lifeways is offering tours to the public.

During a tour Monday, Cathey pointed out how everything from chairs to door handles to railings present a unique shape, flowing smoothly together with nowhere someone could tie a piece of clothing to try to injure themselves.

Patients will be searched and given special clothing when they enter the facil-



The 16 private patient rooms feature attached bathrooms with flexible mat doors that provide privacy without allowing people to barricade themselves inside.

ity. Soft rubber hooks in the 16 private rooms can't hold more than a T-shirt's weight.

Each of the individual rooms — decorated with a mural of an aspen tree — has a small bathroom with sink and toilet, walled off with a flexible mat attached to the wall by velcro, providing visual privacy without allowing people to bar-

ricade themselves inside.

In the center of the two hallways is a lounge area where patients can play board games, watch television, eat meals or socialize. A smaller “reflection room” allows for a quieter atmosphere, and the supervised courtyard with anti-climb fencing offers fresh air. There are also rooms

where patients can meet with their therapist and/or family members.

Cathey said Lifeways is “pretty proud” of the hospital.

“It's somewhere we would want our family or ourselves to come here, should the need arise,” she said. “We tried to make it as home-like as possible.”



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Lifeways is preparing to open their newly constructed Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital at 1212 W. Linda Ave. in Hermiston. The facility will provide 16 private rooms available for residents experiencing a severe mental health crisis.

Before the state does its final sign-off to open the facility, it needs to be fully staffed. Cathey said recruiting positions such as psychiatrists and masters-level therapists can be difficult in a rural area, so if anyone is interested in working for Aspen Springs they should give Lifeways a call.

She said the hospital will be staffed around the clock, with 12-14 staff during the day and about half that number at night.

The average patient will

stay five to eight nights. While Umatilla County residents in crisis have been sent out of the area for hospitalization in the past, Cathey said, their discharge will now be easier to plan while their therapist, medical provider, family and friends are in the same town or county.

“We will serve the entire state, since psychiatric beds are at a premium, but the goal is to serve the community first and foremost, meaning Eastern Oregon as a whole,” she said.

Umatilla Electric joins its voice with co-ops nationwide to protect nonprofit status

By **KATY NESBITT**
FOR THE HERMISTON HERALD

Umatilla Electric of Hermiston is one of dozens of electric cooperatives across the nation supporting passage of a bill in Congress aimed at protecting their nonprofit status.

The cooperatives are asking members of the House of Representatives to pass the “Revitalizing Underdeveloped Rural Areas and Lands Act,” also known as House Bill 2147 and Senate Bill 1032.

The bills were proposed to fix what Steve Myers, Umatilla Electric member services administrator, called “an unintended consequence of the 2017 tax law.”

Myers said Oregon's other electric cooperatives — which are collectively represented by the Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association — are urging Congress to pass the RURAL Act. He said the co-ops are also asking their customers to contact their congressional representatives, as well, to ask them to vote on the bills in the respective houses of Congress.

“We have joined other electric cooperatives in Oregon and around the U.S. in supporting this legislation, and we would appreciate any local support for passage of the Revitalizing Underdeveloped Rural Areas and Lands Act (RURAL) Act,” Myers said.

An effort has been underway since this past summer,

Myers said, and Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association, various electric-co-op managers, board members and other staff from co-ops met with legislators in D.C. and sent letters and emails urging passage.

The concern stems from a provision in the 2017 “Tax Cuts and Jobs Act” that considers federal, state and local grants as “non-member income” and potentially taxable for electric cooperatives.

Ted Case, executive director of the Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association, said in his online newsletter, the RURAL Act is “no run-of-the-mill piece of legislation.”

“The RURAL Act allows co-ops to receive grants for a host of programs — including disaster aid, broadband and economic development — without losing their tax exempt status,” he said. “It's a complicated tax issue. What you need to know is that this bill needs to pass. And soon. The Oregon delegation with its incredible seniority and clout is well-positioned to make it happen. Our senior senator, Ron Wyden, is the ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee.”

Before passage of the 2017 tax law state and federal grants that helped electric co-ops restore service and rebuild electrical infrastructures after a disaster or expand broadband to underserved rural areas were defined as “capital” and not “income.” Electric coopera-

tives serving 19 million customers banded together to encourage Congress to pass the Revitalizing Underdeveloped Rural Areas and Lands Act.

In order to be considered tax-exempt, electric cooperatives must receive at least 85% of their income from their members. If a co-op receives financial support from an agency like the Federal Emergency Management Agency following a storm or wildfire that increases its non-member income more than 15%, it is at risk of being taxed. To address this provision in the 2017 tax bill a bipartisan group from Oregon's congressional delegation — U.S. Representatives Earl Blumenauer, Peter DeFazio, Kurt Schrader and Greg Walden — co-sponsored the bill. Myers said the Oregon co-ops are also looking to Sen. Ron Wyden, the ranking member of the Finance Committee, and Oregon electric co-ops for help.

“This summer we urged our federal legislators, especially Sen. Ron Wyden, to support the proposed law that would protect electric cooperatives' tax-exempt status when they receive state or federal grants,” Myers said.

Wyden said he fought to strip the new tax on rural electric co-ops from the 2017 tax bill, something he called a “serious concern for electric co-ops and their customers.”

The new bicameral bill aims to eliminate it.

“While the supporters of the 2017 law would not listen beforehand to my common-sense solutions to protect organizations that receive federal aid from getting hit with surprise tax bills, I remain open to sitting down with my colleagues to address the long list of problems in this deeply flawed tax scheme, including protections to ensure ratepayers aren't the ones suffering from this bad bill,” Wyden said.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Umatilla Electric Cooperative of Hermiston is one of many electric cooperatives expressing their support for House Bill 2147 and Senate Bill 1032 which would help protect the nonprofit status of the cooperative.



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PET OF THE WEEK

Danny is an adorable 9 week old pup who is going to be a big boy! He is current on vaccines, wormed and scheduled for neuter and microchip. He is Husky, Lab and Border Collie mix. Please research the breeds before applying. He will grow quite large and needs room to run and get regular exercise. Fence is required.



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