

**UPDATES**

State health plan website will be unavailable July 2-5 during upgrade

HERMISTON HERALD

The Oregon Department of Human Services and the Oregon Health Authority will be upgrading the eligibility system Oregonians use to apply for health insurance coverage.

As part of that transition, the online application for the Oregon Health Plan will be unavailable from July 2-5 while the upgrade is being put into place, according to a news release from the state.

Any application that is started before then but not submitted by 4 p.m. on July 2 will not carry over to the new system and will need to be restarted, officials said.

People can still mail in paper applications or apply over the phone at 1-800-699-9075 during that time. Both options are available in multiple languages.

According to DHS, the new Oregon ONE system will continue to be upgraded, in phases, through February 2021.

Once the system is fully upgraded, Oregon residents will be able to apply for all of their cash, child care, food and medical benefits in one place.

"This upgrade is just the first step in improving the way the state delivers health and human services benefits to Oregonians and their families," DHS director Fariborz Pakseresht said in a statement.



Lifeways CEO Tim Hoekstra, center, prepares to cut the ribbon at a celebration for the opening of the organization's new Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital in Hermiston. Photo contributed by Kimberly Nevil

# Hope for healing

## Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital will offer inpatient care

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

**W**hen Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer worked for the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office, he says, he saw far too many people in the middle of a mental health crisis who ended up in the Umatilla County Jail because there were no available beds for them at an inpatient mental health facility.

"They've turned our jail into a mental health facility, and our corrections staff are not mental health professionals," he said.

Shafer said there is a "humongous need" for psychiatric hospital beds in the state, which is why he is excited that Umatilla County now has those beds located right in the county as Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital opens in Hermiston.

The 16-bed hospital at 1212 Linda Avenue is run by Lifeways, Inc., a community mental health provider whose services cover parts of Eastern Oregon and Idaho. Lifeways held a ribbon-cutting celebration for the facility on Thurs-



HH file photo

Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital in Hermiston will offer 16 inpatient beds for people experiencing a mental health crisis.

*"Our main focus will be Eastern Oregon, but we will be serving the entire state."*

— **Jana Flatau**, Aspen Springs Administrator

day, June 24.

"We're just really excited to start serving the community," said Aspen Springs Administrator Jana Flatau.

She said it should just take a

few more days for the state to do its final licensing survey before they can start taking patients who are experiencing an acute mental health crisis and need inpatient care. After a brief, scaled-down

"soft opening" period, the facility will offer 16 spots for people temporarily in need of 24-hour care while they are in crisis.

"Our main focus will be Eastern Oregon, but we will be serving the entire state," she said.

Oregon's shortage of beds for psychiatric patients has been a topic of concern across the state, but particularly in Eastern Oregon. As a county commissioner, Shafer said when people asked him during his campaign what Umatilla County's top problem is, there was no doubt in his mind it was inadequate resources for addressing mental health.

He criticized state government for cutting thousands of mental health beds, including the Blue Mountain Recovery Center in Pendleton in 2014. He also said the state needs a mental health-oriented version of the Justice Reinvestment Program, which focuses on reducing recidivism by funding additional supervision and supports for people who are released from prison.

He said he has heard area residents say they were afraid to send

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Shearer's Foods announced on June 29 that six employees of its Hermiston processing plant have tested positive for COVID-19. Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

## COVID-19 cases rise in Umatilla County

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

Umatilla County hit a record new number of hospitalizations for COVID-19 on Tuesday, June 30, according to Umatilla County Public Health.

The county health department announced that eight Umatilla County residents with COVID-19 are currently hospitalized. Overall, as of June 30, the county has had a total of 482 confirmed cases and currently has 42 presumptive cases. According to the county, 267 people have recovered and there are 252 active cases when counting both confirmed and presumptive.

The health department cur-

rently defines a presumptive case as someone who has been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 and is now showing symptoms, but their test results have not yet come back.

On Monday, June 29, the county reported its fifth death of a COVID-19 patient. The patient was a 74-year-old man with underlying health conditions who tested positive on June 21 and died at Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston on June 26.

"We recognize that we are in a very abnormal situation with an unknown endpoint and as such, increased stress, fear and anxiety

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