

Coalition of Columbia County residents trying for local hospital

met August 14 with members of the newly formed Columbia County Hospital Coalition to discuss concerns about the lack of a local hospital and the coalition's activities to secure one in St. Helens.

Several situations are creating increased need for emergency services in the county, particularly the closure of the bridge to Longview for repairs, and the Lewis and Clark celebration. Chief George Dunkel

of the Columbia River Fire and Rescue District noted that each ambulance run from his district to Portland takes at least two hours of staff and vehicle time, which decreases their ability to respond to other emergencies.

He said there are also more calls, because they must respond to maritime emergencies now that the Coast Guard has shifted its focus to maritime security.

The Longview bridge closure will add stress to county emergency systems when ambulances must go to either Astoria or Portland instead of Longview. The Lewis and Clark celebration is also expected to add to the number of rescues for our system.

In addition to emergency capacity, the group discussed the limited medical services that are available locally. They expressed hope that, with a hospital, services such as dialysis, chemotherapy, pediatrics, etc., would be more accessible.

Another potential benefit of expanded local emergency care would be the ability to attract and retain businesses, which would strengthen the local economy.

Rep. Wu suggested that the coalition seek "anchor" providers, HMOs and Preferred Provider Organizations for a hospital, to be sure it would be able to take a variety of patients with solid insurance support. Further, he recommended they look into the possibility of a Veterans Administration contract for services to those with VA benefits.

Wu said that a hospital would have an economic benefit to the area. He also noted the group is expressing an important element of self-determination in providing for the needs of local residents.

Among others attending the meeting were Columbia River Fire and Rescue Chief George Dunkel, State Rep. Betsy Johnson, Columbia County Emergency Services Director John Clouse, Karen Punch of Columbia Health District, and Pam Rahn, Coordinator for the Hospital Coalition.



Rep. David Wu met with a group of Columbia County residents who are working to secure better medical services. He is shown here with, from left, Pam Rahn, Diane Dillard and Karen Punch.

Grants help fund special United Way programs

United Way of Columbia County has announced the receipt of two grants earmarked for special purposes.

A \$1000 grant from Armstrong World Industries will help support the Loaned Executive position. This grant will be used to pay for hours, mileage and other campaign-related expenses during the 2002-2003 United Way campaign.

"The Loaned Executive grant allows us to hire someone to work just during the campaign and cover many more businesses within our communities," said Kathye Beck, Executive Director of United Way of Columbia County.

The local organization has just two part-time employees.

The second gift is a commu-

nity grant totaling \$1904.19, from The Fred Meyer Foundation. It will be used to purchase school supplies for county students in need, from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Supplies will be purchased and distributed throughout Colum-

bia County to specific organizations, which will distribute the school supplies to students. United Way does not give supplies directly to students by . Any supplies that are not used prior to the start of school will be kept for distribution later.

United Way campaign goal set

Wayne Kostur, president of Rainier Chamber of Commerce and superintendent of Rainier School District and Karen Punch, president of St. Helens/Scappoose Chamber of Commerce, announced a goal of \$407,609 for the 2002-03 United Way of Columbia County campaign. The need is great, Kostur and Punch stressed, when they announced the goal.

"Over the last two years,

there has been a 28 percent increase in requests for food, county wide," said Kathye Beck, director of United Way of Columbia County. "United Way of Columbia County continues to work with the members of this community to improve the lives of the residents. Together, we can make a difference."

For more information, or to find out how you can help, call 1-503-556-3614.

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