

Hospital District receives \$675,000 federal grant

SCHD looks at options for retention, recruitment

By Robert Galbreath
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PINEDALE – A variety of local, state and national grants are available for hospitals and clinics grappling with the financial fallout from the COVID-19, including shortages in critical staff like nurses.

The federal government released \$7.5 billion through the American Rescue Plan in November 2021 to assist rural health-care providers and facilities affected by the pandemic.

The funds are available through grants distributed by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), affiliated with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Sublette County Hospital District jumped at the opportunity to apply, said Kari DeWitt, public relations director and grant writer.

The district received approval from the HRSA for a \$675,000 rural fund grant, DeWitt told the board of trustees on Jan. 26.

HRSA rural fund grant money can be used in diverse ways, from obtaining equipment to providing staff recruitment and retention bonuses, said DeWitt.

Hospital district staff and administration considered different options to use the funds to benefit the clinics, said Dave Doorn, district administrator. The plans would be submitted to the trustees and the HRSA for approval before moving forward.

District administration was particularly interested in using funds to keep providers and staff in Sublette County, and attract new

candidates, Doorn added.

Doorn and the administration began a review of the employee pay scale, comparing wages in Sublette County to those paid across the region to “find where we stand” on employee compensation.

Board chairwoman Tonia Hoffman thanked DeWitt for the “fantastic work” put into obtaining the grant. The HRSA grant is a one-time payment, and Hoffman encouraged administration to develop a sustainable plan to maintain new programs created through the grant.

Dr. David Burnett, the district’s new medical director, agreed that sustainability was important and emphasized employee retention as the “key to our existence.”

The \$675,000 HRSA grant brings the total amount of grant money received by the hospital district since July to \$1.2 million, DeWitt said.

Another significant source of grants came from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The hospital district received roughly \$400,000 from the agency to reimburse costs incurred during the pandemic, DeWitt explained.

The money covered additional staffing salaries for specimen collectors and overtime hours for laboratory testing, along with supplies and money to cover ambulance transfers to hospitals across the region during pandemic spikes, DeWitt added.

The district also received grants from the Green River Valley Health Foundation and Sublette BOCES to assist in creating a program piloted by Sharon Rutsch, clinical services coordinator and laboratory

PINEDALE ROUNDUP

OBITUARY

Earl ‘Marty’ Preston
Jan. 31, 1956 – Jan. 22, 2022



Earl Martin (Marty) Preston passed away on Jan. 22, 2022, in Rock Springs, Wyo. Marty was born in Casper, Wyo., to Earl and Donna Preston on Jan. 31, 1956. Marty attended Casper grade schools and then moved with his family to Big Piney, Wyo., where he graduated in 1975 from Big Piney High School. Marty was employed with his family in the electrical contracting industry while also attending college in Ogden, Utah. Marty subsequently changed careers and excelled in insurance sales, where he enjoyed many long-term business and client friendships.

Marty will be remembered as a free spirit with unlimited generosity and humor, his love for the holiday season with his family and his love for all animals. He was preceded in death by his mother, Donna Preston, his grandparents, Harold and Maria Bressler and Virgil and Helen Moore. He is survived by his father, Earl L. Preston, his brother, Michael Preston (Debbie) and his sister, LeAnn Wilson (Steve).

Those we love dearly don’t go away, they walk beside us every day unseen and not heard, but always near and missed and very dear.

director, to train existing staff to become certified medical laboratory techs through a partnership with Casper College.

Additional grants will help establish a similar nurses education program initiated by Vicky Marshall, director of nursing, through the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, DeWitt stated.

The district is pursuing American Rescue Plan funds allocated by Gov. Mark Gordon’s strike team for health-care infrastructure initiatives, DeWitt added. The strike team, is seeking projects that could have a “long-term impact” on a community and “benefit a wide group of citizens,” DeWitt said.

The strike team set aside \$55 million, with the potential for a facility to receive up to \$5 million, DeWitt told the board. The grant provided “many options” for health-care facilities, she said.

The State Lands and Investment Board will distribute the strike force’s health-care funds, DeWitt said, with application reviews expected in February or March.

Board members expressed gratitude to DeWitt for procuring grant money. DeWitt thanked Michelle Stauthamer, the district’s staff accountant, for assisting in the grant

application process.

USDA loan update

The hospital district continues to wait for a response on its loan application through the U.S. Department of Agriculture to fund the construction of a critical access hospital, Doorn told board members.

The district did not have a firm date on when the application will be presented to the USDA’s national loan committee, he added.

DeWitt said the district hoped to receive approval by the end of the fiscal year’s first quarter.

“Lorraine Werner (at the USDA state office) has indicated that she hopes to lock in the historically low interest rate of 2 1/8 percent for our project as interest rates may go up in the second quarter of 2022,” DeWitt explained to the Roundup.

Trustee Jamison Ziegler said all building projects were on hold until the district received the USDA loan.

Hoffman added the merger between the hospital district and Sublette Center also awaited final approval from the USDA. The moving parts and paperwork were “in place” for the merger to take place once the USDA loan application receives the green light, she added.

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Sunday: 8 a.m. Tuesday: 5:30 p.m. at Church
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