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New Clinic Serves Rural Wasco

A Grassroots Effort Made It Happen

Southern Wasco County residents who once had to drive 40 to 60 miles one way to see a doctor or fill a prescription can now find quality medical care a little closer to home.

The Deschutes Rim Health Clinic in Maupin offers basic health and medical services including treatment for minor injuries, acute illnesses and chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and coronary artery disease. Health physicals, immunizations, pharmacy and laboratory services are also available.

The clinic serves a population of about 4,500 people who reside in the communities of Sportsman's Park, Wamic, Tygh Valley, Pine Grove, Juniper Flat, Maupin, and South Junction.

A Warm Welcome

Hospice of The Gorge, like the Deschutes Rim Health Clinic, is well aware of the challenges of serving rural communities. We at Hospice of The Gorge have been helping families in rural places since our inception almost thirty years ago.

We were more than delighted then, to meet the kindred spirits of the Deschutes Rim Health Clinic, at their Grand Opening in March. We were amazed to learn what they've been able to accomplish, and felt their story should be told.

We prepared this article as a way to welcome these good folks to our community. Please join us in applauding their commitment to community care, and in wishing them all the best.

Sincerely,
Gretchen Hagen
Executive Director, Hospice of The Gorge

Physician assistant Sharon DeHart has served as the clinic’s fulltime primary healthcare provider since it opened in September 2007. “I tell my patients that as a primary care provider, I am like the coach on the team, the one that starts and coordinates everything,” she says. “You need someone who ties all the pieces of your healthcare together from your chiropractor and specialist to your naturopath and surgeon.”

Prior to relocating to Wasco County, DeHart worked for the Samaritan Health Physicians, a network of Oregon hospitals, clinics and physicians that serves the mid-Willamette Valley and the Central Oregon Coast. “I’ve always wanted to work in a rural community and have my own clinic,” she says. Her husband Gary also shares his talents at the facility helping with everything from medical assisting to maintaining and repairing the clinic’s equipment.

DeHart credits office manager and medical assistant, Diana Gerber, with keeping the facility running smoothly. “Diana got this place up and running in one year and recruited our medical director, Dr. Steve McLennon.”

Stephen McLennon M.D. has practiced family and urgent care medicine in The Dalles since 1991. He also serves as the medical director for the stress reduction program at Mid-Columbia Medical Center. McLennon says he’s happy to be a part of a rural clinic like Deschutes Rim. “For most people, the clinic provides the security that somebody is nearby and somebody cares,” he says. “Sharon is very committed and Diana knows everybody. That’s invaluable. It helps our patients feel comfortable, confident and known.”



Photo taken at the Grand Opening in March, courtesy WamPinRock New.

Left to right: Sherry Wick (volunteer), Diana Gerber (Office Manager and Medical Assistant), Stephen McLennon (Medical Director and part-time provider), Sharon DeHart (PA and fulltime provider), Gary DeHart (Medical Assistant and Mechanical Engineer)

Efforts to expand health services in southern Wasco County began more than a decade ago as part of a larger grassroots effort. Community volunteers formed the non-profit group, White River Health & Living, with the aim of developing of local health care services, creating jobs

and providing senior retirement living opportunities so residents could remain in the community and near their relatives.

In 2001, voters in South Wasco County passed a proposal to provide tax money to support those efforts. The resulting White River Health District, which is overseen by a volunteer board of directors, financed the loan to build, equip and operate the Deschutes Rim Health Clinic. The facility includes two exam rooms, a procedure room, office space, a pharmacy and a visitor's waiting room.

For local residents, the Deschutes Rim Health Clinic is a welcome addition to the existing healthcare services available including hospitals in The Dalles, Maupin and Bend, volunteer ambulance crews, first responders, and hospice care. "We are all doing the same thing—caring for our communities," says DeHart. "This is about how we can coordinate the best possible care for the residents of the area and the people who come through."

For more information, contact Sharon DeHart at the Deschutes Rim Health Clinic, at 541-395-2911 or 541-328-0903

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Hospice of The Gorge

Hospice of The Gorge is a team of health care professionals dedicated to bringing help and hope to people suffering from the changes in life that matter most. We are a non-profit organization that has been helping people with end-of-life needs and related changes since 1981.

We partner with families, health care providers and other organizations. Our goal is to help people in communities we serve live meaningful and fulfilling lives ... and to achieve closure when it's time.

The oldest and largest hospice in the region, we serve eight counties, including Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Morrow, Wheeler, Skamania, and Klickitat. Due to strong community support, we have never denied care to anyone for financial reasons.