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Expanding care

Kootenai Health breaks ground on new cancer center in Post Falls

POST FALLS -- The beat goes on for Kootenai Health in Post Falls. The hospital on Tuesday broke ground on a \$14.6 million, 21,000-square-foot cancer center on the east side of its existing health care park between Mullan and Polston avenues. Construction is expected to take about a year.

"We're so excited to finally see this phase of planning under way," said Jim Curtis, Kootenai Health's board chairman.



From left, Gary and Gladys Schneidmiller, the family that donated property in Post Falls to Kootenai Health; Jim Curtis, Kootenai Health's board chairman; Amanda Jibby, Post Falls Junior Miss; Post Falls Mayor Clay Larkin; and Joe Morris, CEO Kootenai Health, participate in Tuesday's groundbreaking of a new \$14.6 million, 21,000-square-foot cancer center in Post Falls.

Planning has been in the works for about two years. When the project was first announced, Kootenai Health planned to build a \$3 million, 8,000-square-foot facility.

However, predicted demand for the center has risen due to population increase projections,

especially among seniors. Joe Morris, Kootenai Health CEO, said the hospital is expecting a 53 percent growth in chemotherapy patients from now through 2016 and a 49 percent hike in radiation therapy patients.

He said Kootenai Health's cancer center in Coeur d'Alene and a branch office at Bonner General Hospital in Sandpoint won't be able to keep up with future demand in North Idaho.

The center will be built to eventually support two medical oncologists upstairs and two radiation therapists downstairs with complete support services, including patient exams, dietary, a pharmacy, chemotherapy infusion and labs. "The radiation therapy equipment alone will cost \$3.5 million," Morris told about 125 people at the groundbreaking ceremony.

About 20 people will eventually work in the center. Naseer Ahmad, a medical oncologist and hematologist, will move from Kootenai Health's existing facility in Post Falls to the new center. The building and 79-space parking lot will consume about two-thirds of the remaining five acres of Kootenai Health's 10-acre site. The horseshoe-shaped facility makes maximum use of windows and features Northwest-type architecture with rock pillars and wood siding.

Patients and visitors will be able to look down onto a healing garden courtyard. "We think it will be a restful and welcoming place for families and patients," Morris said. The entryway to the building is raised and features circular covered drop-off spot. The project contractor is Contractors Northwest. Long-term plans call for a three-story parking garage for the remaining open space.

Manny and Gladys Schneidmiller from Post Falls donated 10 acres to Kootenai Health for its Post Falls facilities about 15 years ago. "I'm happy to hear that there's going to be a fine program here, but I hope I never have to use it," Gladys said. "I've been blessed with good health, but I still welcome all of this. Post Falls has been good to us, and we wanted to give back."

Post Falls Mayor Clay Larkin said the center will be a symbol of what Post Falls is about. "Warm, friendly, peaceful, inviting and serving people," he said.