

Idaho Business Review, Monday, Aug. 17, 2009

Saint Al's merges Life Flight with regional care network

By Zach Hagadone

IDAHO BUSINESS REVIEW

Boise-based Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center is now part owner in Life Flight Network, a regional air medical services provider based in the Portland area.

The deal, announced Aug. 8, takes effect Sept. 1 and will result in the merger of Saint Al's Life Flight program with other air medical transport programs in Aurora, Hillsboro and Eugene in Oregon, and Longview and Dallesport in Washington. With the merger, existing Life Flight bases in Boise, Mountain Home and McCall, along with one location in Ontario, Ore., will be added to that list.

The network, which consists of Legacy Health System, Providence Health System and Oregon Health and Science University, will boast nine medical helicopters, three fixed-wing aircraft and three critical care ground ambulances.

Jennifer Krajnik, a spokeswoman for Saint Al's, said the merger takes Life Flight "to the next level."

"Let's say one of our Idaho members gets in an accident in Portland, if they're a member of Life Flight they'll have access to that larger network," she said.

"There are more helicopters, more bases; if someone is picked up over there they'll pay the member price," she said.

Saint Alphonsus officials said current Life Flight employees have been offered positions in the expanded net-

work, and current members of Life Flight will be able to renew their membership at the same rate as their current plan. Lifetime members of the network will continue to have the same privileges.

Life Flight Network Executive Director Michael Griffiths said the addition of Saint Al's Life Flight brings the company's work force to about 110 direct staff, plus another 50 to 60 contracted aviation workers. He said Life Flight Network plans to hire three to four in Boise for management, education, marketing and outreach.

In total, Saint Al's brings four helicopters, one fixed-wing aircraft and nearly 40 employees to the network.

"They bring enough to the equation that it entitles them to ownership at the same level as our other majority owners," Griffiths said. "In a sense I suppose you could say they bought ownership – not necessarily with cash, though, but with the business that they currently have."

Krajnik said the deal is a win for Saint Al's not only because it gives members expanded air medical coverage, but because it puts the program in the hands of a firm with over 30 years experience in the field. She and Griffiths both said they welcome other Idaho hospitals to join the network as well.

"We're hoping that other hospitals show an interest, but right now Saint Alphonsus is the only member from Idaho," Griffiths said.

"We welcome others to jump on board too," Krajnik said.