

**Twin Falls Times News, Thursday, Sept. 8, 2011 – by Kimberlee Kruesi**

## **St. Luke's Adds New Helicopter**

With new technology comes the hope of saving more lives.

Air St. Luke's, operated under St. Luke's Health System, is adding two Bell 429 helicopters to its fleet. One of the new aircraft is based out of St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center in Twin Falls and will cover a 130-mile radius. The helicopter will make frequent stops to the Wood River Valley and Salt Lake City.

St. Luke's is only the second hospital in the country to purchase this type of Bell helicopter. The aircraft has been specifically designed to assist emergency responses, said Michael McGrane, director of Air St. Luke's. "We are investing in the safety margin," McGrane said. "We can do things today that we never could 20 years ago."

*Air St. Luke's pilot Bernie Moen fuels the new Bell 429 helicopter that will respond to medical emergencies from St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center in Twin Falls. The air ambulance can cruise at 170 mph and fly more than 400 miles before it needs to be refueled.*

St. Luke's doesn't own the helicopter but contracts with Boise-based Idaho Helicopters Inc., which operates and maintains the aircraft. The hospital will use the \$6 million chopper to replace previously used Bell 430s. The older models will be sold once St. Luke's ground crews are trained on the new helicopter.



The helicopter can cruise at up to 175 miles per hour, McGrane said — roughly 15 percent faster than its predecessor. The helicopter has better safety features than the older models, said Doug Mohr, assistant chief pilot. It includes an anti-collision alert system for pilots and rear clamshell doors for easier transportation.

"This is the smoothest helicopter I've ever been in," Mohr said, who has been flying helicopters since 1985.

The ride will improve the quality of patient care, said Vickie Lancaster, respiratory therapist for St. Luke's. She rides with women in labor while transporting them to different facilities.

"It's important for pregnant women to have a faster and smoother ride," Lancaster said. "When you're in labor, you want a peaceful environment and this will help with that."