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New imaging center to aid women's health

St. Luke's Wood River to build new Women's health center

When breast cancer survivor Tonia Bruess, who works at St. Luke's Wood River Medical Center, had a sketchy-looking mammogram recently, she had to go to Boise for a digital mammogram to get a more accurate diagnosis.

Like Bruess, Julie Wrigley, a part-time Ketchum resident, believes that giving women access to a comprehensive, state-of-the-art women's imaging facility is imperative in prevention and survival. Leading off the fundraising drive for the Center, Wrigley recently donated \$500,000 to the proposed Women's Imaging Center.

"I think that a new Women's Imaging Center will help to comprehensively address breast care and other women's health issues," Wrigley said. "I am pleased that I can help give local women access to the most advanced imaging technology in a healing environment."

According to the American Cancer Society, Idaho has the lowest mammography-screening rate in the nation. Some of this is due to the rural nature of the state, lack of insurance and because having a mammogram can be uncomfortable, something that will not be the case with digital technology.

St. Luke's Wood River has designed a new, fully-digital, 2,500 square-foot Women's in the Physician Office Building adjacent to the hospital. The Wood River Foundation has taken on the fundraising project. If all goes well with fundraising the center could open in the spring of 2009.

Rooms are sectioned off and identified with signs for pelvic and breast ultra sound, bone density DEXA Scan, mammography, a roomy reception and waiting room, a reading room, dressing rooms and exam rooms. It's roomy and sunny, and a look at the interior design motifs shows a healing, comforting atmosphere.

"We are at a critical juncture in fundraising," said St. Luke's Wood River Foundation Stewardship Coordinator Megan Thomas. "The hospital is focusing on paying for the Medical Center in Hailey. To fund the project, the St. Luke's Wood River Foundation, in partnership with philanthropic leaders in the community, has committed to raise \$4.5 million."

This amount includes \$2.5 million in start-up costs plus \$2 million in a three part endowment for future technology, continuing education for staff and the ability to temporarily subsidize the higher cost of the digital technology.

"The digital mammogram is the cornerstone of the center," Thomas said.

Considered superior to standard mammography, digital mammography can be magnified, and contrasted on a computer screen for enhanced readability by the radiologist. Unlike film it can also be sent via computer for second opinions to radiologists who specialize in breast disease.

All mammograms will be analyzed on a daily basis so that results can be communicated to patients within 24 hours. The Women's Imaging Center will be staffed by a full-time nurse and full-time radiological technologist, certified in mammography, both of whom will be women.

"This is a big one for the hospital," Thomas said. "It carves out a new niche and is very specific to the hospital's commitment to the community and women's health."

Besides the fundraising drive, proceeds from the St. Luke's Wood River Volunteer Core's holiday ball on Dec. 13 will go towards the Women's Imaging Center. Raffle tickets are on sale now for three large prizes. As well there are naming opportunities for the center, something cities have used to fund new baseball stadiums, for instance.