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Benefit Fund of McKenzie Health receives \$25,000

BY JAMES C. FALCON
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While hospitals are usually the ones to give out vaccinations, sometimes they need a boost in the arm to help sustain services.

McKenzie Health, the Watford City-based hospital which also has outreach clinics in western North Dakota and northeastern Montana, recently received such a boost in the form of \$25,000 from the Rural Community Grant Fund.

On October 10, The Benefit Fund of McKenzie Health received the donation to help purchase Contrast Enhanced Mammography (CEM) upgrades for the hospital.

Through this donation, it will help enable McKenzie Health to provide “additional imaging options for breast cancer screening and evaluation,” said David Hokanson, VP Branch Manager with AgCountry Farm Credit Services. (AgCountry Farm Credit Services, along with Farm Credit Services of Mandan and AgriBank established the Rural Community Grant Fund to assist in the implementation and development of projects and programs in western North Dakota.)

In all, The Benefit Fund of McKenzie Health has raised a total of \$72,000 — including the recent \$25,000 donation — for the purposes of purchasing CEM improvements, explained Lynn



LYNN WELKER-FEVOLD

McKenzie Health recently received \$25,000 to help purchase Contrast Enhanced Mammography upgrades. The Benefit Fund of McKenzie Health, “a critical arm of the hospital,” is designed to help provide fundraising for capital projects, equipment, staff recruitment and training, explained Lynn Welker-Fevold (far right), Chief Development Officer for the Benefit Fund.

Welker-Fevold, Chief Development Officer for the Benefit Fund and Chief of Communications, Innovation and Marketing for McKenzie Health.

During routine mammograms, if a

lump is identified, a diagnostic mammogram may be needed.

“Many women have dense breasts,” said Denise Haglund, radiology manager at McKenzie Health. “This makes

it difficult to see things like tumors. Some women need further imaging and procedures like MRIs or biop-

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sies. The new software is an easy way to 'see through' the densities with traditional mammograms plus a contrast injection. This may save women from some of those more difficult imaging and procedures keeping them closer to home."

As it wasn't offered previously, women would schedule an appointment elsewhere, sometimes waiting four to six weeks to get the diagnostic mammogram.

"We have an amazing radiology team. They're absolutely top-notch," Welker-Fevold said. "The only hurdle to not providing this was we didn't have the software."

This is where The Benefit Fund's fundraising efforts come in.

The Benefit Fund is the hospital's foundation, which Welker-Fevold described as being "a critical arm of our hospital."

"It helps to provide funding for everything from capital projects, equipment, staff recruitment, and training," Welker-Fevold said.

As of Wednesday, the hospital also wrapped up another fundraising campaign: to raise \$100,000 to upgrade the hospital's magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) hardware and software.

Through these upgrades, Welker-Fevold said, it will cut the time of an MRI in half.

While MRI's can be claustrophobic and loud, the technology offers "the best of the best for improving patient experience," she said, adding that Steven and Wanda Nelson and Lund Oil "were instrumental in bringing this to fruition."

McKenzie Health can perform six to eight MRI scans a day, plus fitting in emergency needs as well, Welker-Fevold said, adding that the upgrades will allow the hospital to increase that. "We have people coming to us from around the region," she said, noting it is a similar challenge to mammography in that it is a needed service and, without improvements like this, patients may wait weeks to be scheduled at other facilities.

Critical Access Hospitals like McKenzie Health — one of about 40 in the state — operate on tight budgets, Welker-Fevold said. And while McKenzie Health is in the black, it doesn't have extra funding available to add on to its existing services. Fortunately, Welker-Fevold added, the hospital is located in "a great area, a community of people that care about having that equipment upgraded and having services available."

"Being able to address



LYNN WELKER-FEVOLD

Upgrades to McKenzie Health's magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) hardware and software, made possible through donations made to The Benefit Fund of McKenzie Health, have halved the time of an MRI.

anything on the spot in our facility is so critical, due to our frontier location" she said. "We've been able to accomplish that, thanks to the donors."

Individual and corporate solicitations, capital campaigns and grant writing efforts are the main mechanisms in which The Benefit Fund raises money, Welker-Fevold said.

The McKenzie Community Foundation, a branch of the North Dakota Community Foundation, also represents local donors. Recently, the local foundation

donated \$3,000 to The Benefit Fund for two purposes: to help train nurses on infant bereavement training and to offset needs for elderly patients in the hospital's Chronic Care management program.

In the future

Looking into the future, Welker-Fevold said The Benefit Fund has two projects in mind for capital campaigns.

Currently, the fund has raised \$17,000 of a total \$100,000 project to purchase a front loader machine to aid in snow moving during North Dakota's infamous

winters.

"When we have some of these major snow events ... sometimes we have so much snow by feet, those things can be difficult," Welker-Fevold said, adding that while the city of Watford City "has been awesome in helping us out," it would be invaluable to have machinery on site to help in snow-moving efforts.

"We need to be able to have the ambulance bay cleaned out, no ifs, ands or buts," Welker-Fevold said. "We have had challenges getting the ambulance in and out when we have major snow. We need to be able to keep the area clear and safe for quick entry and exit. North Dakota winters can be a little cruel. We feel that having this item on location will be a game changer for us."

The second is to help make up the difference that inflation and other costs have caused for the hospital's Good Shepherd Home's upgrades. This month, ground was broken for the home's chapel, courtyard and greenhouse expansion and upgrades.

The Benefit Fund raised \$1.3 million for that project, but "to bring it full circle, it will cost \$1.6 million," Welker-Fevold said, adding that the original bid for the project was obtained in September 2021.

"Since then, we have obviously had an increase in what some of the supplies cost, and also the cost of labor to bring folks to western North Dakota to subcontract this project," she said.

It will take \$300,000 to close that gap, she added, noting that the project is starting now, with the foundation being poured and squared up "so Construction Engineers can work on it throughout the winter" for an expected completion date in June 2024.

To help with fundraising efforts, the Benefit Fund has implemented a digital platform to provide financial gifts.

"Donors are passionate about different things," Welker-Fevold said. "Some are passionate about radiology and imaging services. Others are passionate about items pertaining to residents at the Good Shepherd Home. Some are interested in new builds and legacy opportunities. We try to keep a number of options available."

To help honor those who give, Welker-Fevold said that a donor appreciation event is scheduled for December 10, from 2-4 p.m. at McKenzie Health.

"We're only able to do extras, capital builds and new equipment because of donors," she said. "We really can't express our thanks enough."