

## **WATCH East improves lives as well as the economy**

Glendive Ranger-Review, 5/4/08

As a community, we can either lift up or tear down. It is our choice; do we enable others to grow and regain their lives or deny that ability? In attending the Open House at WATCH East Thursday, I was pleasantly surprised by the attendance and the reception by the visitors, and the facility itself.

WATCH East is so important not only to those clients obtaining treatment, but also this community. Those who work or volunteer time at WATCH East see miracles happen every day. The residents there for treatment are gaining skills that were out of their reach before.

The public hearing Thursday evening was well attended and many came forward to express support for the program. Over and over, we heard these people need treatment, they are good people who have made some bad choices (like we all have), this community and all communities are safer with clients receiving help at WATCH East rather than sitting in a jail and then returning to communities across the state with not changing behavior or learning tools to make better decisions. The statement we heard over and over again was "this is a good program that needs to be expanded by 10 beds to better serve more of those who need the help." The space is available and is better served helping those who need treatment offered at this facility.

It was noted that the screening committee is doing a great job of making sure that no sex offenders or those with violent histories are allowed to enter the program. They are meeting often and it was noted that many more need treatment. Allowing 10 more beds would mean that more people are getting the help they need.

Not only does this change and improve lives, it is an economic boon for this community -- it has created 23 jobs -- and for the state in general. When someone is convicted of a fourth DUI, it is a felony and the sentence requires time spent in prison. Offenders learn nothing languishing in prison, but when they are able to come to WATCH East, it costs the state half of what it would cost to put that person in prison -- it is a win win for all.

Some of the review meeting attendees mentioned many reasons why the program should be expanded. Some have lost relatives because they did not have this help available to them, some had family members who needed this help and lives have been saved. Others mentioned that they went to WATCH East weekly for Bible study, or AA, and see lives change, including their own. All who have contact with residents have appreciation for them and the growth they have seen come from all that is learned at this facility.

While visiting WATCH East, I read a statement that sums it all up, "No one can change their past, but anyone can start today and make a brand new future!" It is a privilege for the community of Glendive to help.