

Facilitating Recovery

New addiction center offers place to change lives

Montana Standard, 12/19/13

Rounds of thanks were handed out Wednesday to all who made a new \$5 million drug and alcohol treatment center possible in Butte, from Gov. Steve Bullock to those who built the place on Mercury Street.

The project for the new Montana Chemical Dependency Center was put on a fast track from the start, and despite setbacks and red tape, the three-wing complex took shape in 18 months and should be operational next month.

When everybody checks their egos at the door and everybody suits up and nobody has to be a home-un hitter, it's amazing what you can get done," Mike Thatcher, chief executive officer of Community, Counseling, and Correctional Services, Inc., told about 150 people at a dedication ceremony.

The private, not-for-profit organization financed construction of the new center and is leasing it back to the state under a 19-year agreement.

Staff and patients at the current state-run center in the old Silver Bow General Hospital on Continental Drive will move to the new complex in early January, keeping 57 jobs here with hopes of adding a few more.

It will continue to be the only inpatient treatment center for chemical addictions administered by the state, but officials say its layout, rooms, equipment and other amenities will be more conducive to treatment.

That mission - providing care, counseling, guidance and medical help to those battling drugs or alcohol - was not lost in all the platitudes and ribbon-cutting Wednesday.

"It really is that opportunity for some struggling Montanans to change their lives," Bullock said.

Bullock said he realized when he was attorney general that increasing fines and sentences for drug and alcohol crimes was doing little to reduce a problem that lands many in jail and prisons at big costs to taxpayers.

"We have learned we can't simply jail our way out of addiction problems," he said.

Joan Cassidy, a Butte resident who recently retired as Montana's chemical dependency bureau chief, said most people who receive treatment at the center started using drugs or alcohol at an early age.

Some have been in jail or prison and many of the females have children.

"When you look at where they have been, this (addiction) has been their lifetime," she said. "Many are both physically addicted and very much on the emotional side as well."

The mission, she said, is to get them back into the community as responsible adults and in many cases good parents.

The complex includes separate, 16-bed wings for males and females and an administrative building that also will serve as a detoxification unit.

Patients are screened and referred to that level of care by licensed addiction counselors from state-approved, community-based outpatients and inpatient providers, as well as Indian reservations.

Sharon Cunningham, clinical services manager for the center, said patients on average stay about 35 to 40 days, living at the center 24 hours a day while undergoing treatment.

Those services include medical and psychological assessments, treatment and counseling.

"Part of our job is to motivate people to want recovery," Cunningham said. "It's very exciting to see what you do with your life when you get well."