

Sunrise Heights of Wauneta completes successful first year

Written by Wauneta Breeze

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Wauneta's nursing home, Sunrise Heights, recently passed its first anniversary under village ownership on July 1. (Sheri Hink-Wagner | The Wauneta Breeze)

By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

A local milestone passed earlier this week without fanfare. The local nursing home, Sunrise Heights of Wauneta, has completed its first year of operation under Village of Wauneta ownership.

Village board member and nursing home committee member Tony Cribelli said, "It's doing very well. We've shown a profit so far."

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He went on to say, “We’re more than satisfied, it was definitely a good move for the village.”

Two years ago, in July 2011, when Vetter Health Services announced they would cease operations at then-named Heritage of Wauneta in July 2012 locals were given two choices—accept a future without a local nursing home or find a way to fix it.

Continuing Waunetan tradition of not giving in to challenges, locals chose to rally the community and found a way to save Wauneta’s nursing home.

Page Johnston, who serves on the village board and the nursing home committee, has been highly involved in the nursing home effort. He says, “I’m thoroughly convinced we were guided by divine providence along this process.”

On July 1, 2012, their hard work, diligence and determination paid off when the nursing home changed its name to Sunrise Heights of Wauneta and began operation under village ownership.

The road to village ownership was not without its challenges. The journey began with local volunteers and the village board working together to find a way to maneuver through an array of would-be bumps in the road such as federal and state regulations and finances.

The funding which made the village’s purchase of the home came from three distinct sources.

First, local and local-at-heart individual and corporate donors contributed \$240,525, according to the clerk’s report at the June, 2012 Village board meeting.

The second source of revenue for the project was \$150,000 in Village of Wauneta funds.

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The final source of funding was \$500,000 in revenue bonds.

These three funding sources accumulated the \$890,525 needed for the purchase and initial operation expenses of the nursing home.

“Our employees and residents stuck it out through some uncertain times prior to the transition to Sunrise Height,” said administrator Lisa Kisinger. “We couldn’t have done it without the community’s help.”

Now, after a year of village ownership, the nursing home reported a successful first year.

“The first year has gone by fast,” said Kisinger.

In the July 2013 newsletter, Kisinger reported that although the books for June are not yet closed, it appears the facility will complete its first year in the black.

Furthermore, they reported a 89.6 percent occupancy rate in Rural Health Development’s publication “The Rural Report.”

The uncertainties that surrounded the nursing home one and two years ago seem manageable now.

“We are pleased with the successful first year of operation. The village board is grateful to the staff at Sunrise Heights for all their hard work and to the community for their support and patronage,” said Johnston. “We look forward to the future with optimism and enthusiasm.”