



LIBERTY HOUSE FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 81 Fort Harrison, MT 59636

EXHIBIT 4
DATE 3/15/05
#B 5

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Liberty House is a project to construct a new, one-level building on the campus of the Fort Harrison, Montana, VA Medical Center. This facility would house family members of hospitalized veterans while their loved ones are being cared for at the Medical Center.

The Fort Harrison VA Medical Center provides a full range of health services for veterans, including rheumatology, audiology, neurology, medical oncology, surgery, urology, coronary angiography, psychiatry and ambulatory care. In FY 03, the VA Montana Healthcare System supported over 220,029 patient visits. Of these visits, 116,735 occurred at Fort Harrison. Many patients were referred for specialty care visits by their primary care providers across the state. The VA Medical Center provided 14,316 inpatient days of care. The average length of stay for an inpatient at the Fort Harrison VA Medical Center is 6.2 days.

The VA National CARES planning data indicates that Montana's veteran enrollment in VA services will continue to grow until 2012 and that enrollment projections through 2022 will remain significantly higher than current enrollment.

The need for Liberty House is vital. It poses a severe hardship for veterans' spouses and other family members to stay in motels/hotels in Helena, in lieu of family housing at the Medical Center. Most motels are five to eight miles from Fort Harrison and no public transportation is available. Safety for these individuals is also an issue. Helena is located in the midst of the Rocky Mountains. It is not unusual for veteran patients to face a difficult drive over the Continental Divide and one or more other mountain passes when traveling to Fort Harrison for medical care. The mountain passes are often closed due to wind and snow. Montana also experiences short days during the winter, which often means driving after dark. Because of their advancing age, many elderly veterans require an attendant or family member to assist them or drive them to Fort Harrison for their care. Many times the spouses are elderly and either do not drive at all or cannot drive at night. Financial need is also a very real problem for many Montana veterans and their families.

As I am sure you are aware, Helena is the capital of Montana and motels/hotels tend to be more expensive here than in any other part of the state. It is very possible that when the state Legislature is in session, a veteran's family can find no moderately priced rooms, if any are available. Hotel/motel costs, especially for an extended period, are often well beyond their means.

Montana is the fourth largest state in the country with an area of 147,138 square miles. Based on the 2000 US Census, Montana has 902,195 residents, of which 107,000 are veterans. With those figures in mind, one out of every eight residents in Montana is a veteran. Montana ranks 49th in per capita annual income of \$21,324 so, as you can see, a Montana veteran's financial condition is also a very real problem.

Of the 56 counties in Montana, all but two have been designated as medically under-served and more than 80% of Montana's veterans reside more than 50 miles from Fort Harrison. A snapshot of the distances from the clinics to the Medical Center follows:

City	Distance (miles)	City	Distance (miles)
Anaconda	91	Billings	238
Bozeman	96	Glasgow	423
Great Falls	88	Miles City	345
Missoula	115	Kalispell	196
Sidney	474		

The VA Montana Healthcare System operated several guest rooms in an outbuilding on the Medical Center campus for several years. The rooms were frequently used and very much appreciated by family members. Unfortunately, the building where those rooms were located was built in the 1890's and was non-ADA accessible and unfeasible to make it compliant. The entryway to this building is multi-level and the existing stairs cannot be feasibly changed to adapt to a wheelchair ramp.

Fort Harrison has recently been upgraded from a seismic III to a seismic IV zone. It was also not financially feasible to initiate the major and costly seismic reinforcements needed to bring the structure up to a seismic IV rating at an estimated cost of \$2 million. In addition to the seismic issues, Building 2 has significant lead-based paint issues. Due to the lead-based paint, earthquake standard failures and access issues, the VA Montana Healthcare System has been directed to close this building.

In the past, the VA Montana Healthcare System has more than once applied for a Fisher House grant to meet these needs, but it was clear that those grants were intended for larger Medical Centers in urban areas and the grants were not approved. The VA's commitment to Liberty House is similar to what it would have been for a Fisher House. Fort Harrison will donate an attractive, accessible building site near the Medical Center. After the Liberty House has been completed, it will be donated to the VA Montana Healthcare System, which will assume responsibility for routine maintenance and operation.

It has been medically shown that the presence of a loved one assists in the healing process, but this valuable aspect of care is made more difficult because of travel conditions, expense of hotel rooms and lack of public transportation.

Thank you for your dedication to this worthwhile project.



VA Montana Healthcare System

October 12, 2004

In Reply Refer To: 436/00

Locations:

Medical Center
1892 Williams Street
Fort Harrison MT 59636
(406) 442-6410

Anaconda Primary Care Clinic
118 E. 7th St.
Anaconda MT 59711
(406) 563-6090

Billings Community Based Clinic
2345 King Avenue West
Billings MT 59102
(406) 651-5670

Bozeman Primary Care Clinic
300 N. Wilson, Suite 703G
Bozeman MT 59715
(406) 522-8923

Glasgow Primary Care Clinic
621 3rd Street South
Glasgow, MT 59230
406-228-3554

Great Falls Primary Care Clinic
1417 - 9th St. South
Suite 200 (Clinic)
Suite 301 (Voc Rehab)
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 761-0179

Kalispell Primary Care Clinic
66 Chestnut
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 751-5980

**Miles City Primary Care Clinic and
Nursing Home**
210 S. Winchester
Miles City MT 59301
(406) 232-3060

Missoula Primary Care Clinic
2687 Palmer Street
Missoula MT 59808
(406) 327-0912

Sidney Primary Care Center
216 - 14th Avenue SW
Sidney, MT 59270
(406) 483-2307

Mrs. Irma Paul
Chairperson, Board of Directors
Liberty House Foundation
PO Box 81, Fort Harrison, MT 59636

Dear Mrs. Paul:

It is with pleasure that I prepare a letter of support for the efforts the Liberty House Foundation is making on behalf of Montana's veterans and their families. Liberty House is a project to construct a new, one-level building on the campus of the Fort Harrison, Montana VA Medical Center. This facility would house family members of hospitalized veterans while their loved ones are being cared for at the Medical Center.

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The need for Liberty House is vital. It poses a severe hardship for veterans' spouses and other family members to stay in motels/hotels in Helena, in lieu of family housing at the Medical Center. Most motels are five to eight miles from Fort Harrison and no public transportation is available. Safety for these individuals is also an issue. Helena is located in the midst of the Rocky Mountains. It is not unusual for veteran patients to face a difficult drive over the Continental Divide and one or more other mountain passes when traveling to Fort Harrison for medical care. The mountain passes are often closed due to wind and snow. Montana also experiences short days during the winter, which often means driving after dark. Because of their advancing age, many elderly veterans require an attendant or family member to assist them or drive them to Fort Harrison for their care. Many times the spouses are elderly and either do not drive at all or cannot drive at night. Financial need is also a very real problem for Montana veterans and their families.

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Serving Montana's Veterans

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Thank you for your dedication to this worthwhile project. If my staff or I can provide information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Lee Logan, Fort Harrison Division Manager, 406 447-7560.

Sincerely,

JOSEPH M. UNDERKOFER
Director

VA Montana Healthcare System Clinic locations.



Number of Enrollees By Year
(With % Change from FY 2001)

