

HIGHLIGHTING MODEL COMMUNITIES

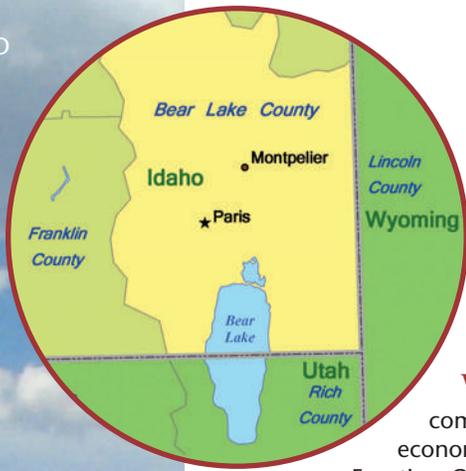
BEAR LAKE  
MEMORIAL HOSPITAL  
MONTPELIER, IDAHO

selected for leadership, not only in health care,  
but also for improving the economic health  
of the community

innovations

A PROJECT OF THE national center for *f*rontier communities

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# Bear Lake MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

MONTPELIER, IDAHO

**welcome** to Bear Lake County, Idaho where a community has come together to create a high quality health care system and a strong local economy. Bear Lake Memorial Hospital was selected by the National Center for Frontier Communities as a model frontier program for presentation in this *Innovations* series. Bear Lake Memorial Hospital is being honored as an excellent model of strong leadership in health care as well as serving as a leader in the regional economy.

## introduction to Bear Lake Valley

Bear Lake Valley is nestled at the southeastern border of Idaho with Wyoming on the east and Utah on the south. Bear Lake County includes this beautiful valley and the surrounding mountains and covers 1,050 square miles. Twenty mile long Bear Lake covers 109 square miles, half in Idaho and half in Utah, and is known as "The Caribbean of the Rockies" because of the color of the clear blue water.

The Bear Lake area has a long and diverse history. The region was originally crisscrossed with Indian trails as indigenous people found plentiful game, fish, wild plants, and berries. The Shoshoni were the first known inhabitants of the area.

Later, the area became a central outpost for both French and English fur traders. There are still sizeable populations of people of French Canadian and English ancestry residing in the area. In the 1840s, many settlers traveling on the Oregon Trail chasing the opportunities of the West passed through the Bear Lake Valley.

The first permanent settlement, Paris, Idaho, was established in 1863 by 30 families who were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons). Montpelier was founded the following year on the Oregon Trail route on the east side of the valley. In 1892, the railroad route was established and passed through Montpelier.

## POPULATION CHANGES

Like many frontier communities in the United States, the Bear Lake area has struggled to maintain its population. After a brief period of population growth in the 1980s, when the population reached 6,931 people, the population has fluctuated. Paris is the county seat with 576 residents, but Montpelier is the largest town, with about 2,600 people. The nearest town with a population over 50,000 is Pocatello, Idaho, ninety miles to the northwest.

## ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT

Agriculture was traditionally the largest industry in the area, and although it is still thirteen percent of total industry, it employs only three percent of the workforce.

Tourism is growing in the region as people discover the beauty of Bear Lake and its proximity to popular vacation destinations such as Yellowstone and Teton National Parks and Jackson Hole, Wyoming. However, the hospitality industry is seasonal and the wages are often low and without benefits. Although Bear Lake County has some of the lowest real estate prices in the state, the per capita income is also low, about \$6,000 less than the state average and \$11,000 less than the national average.

## awards & honors for the Bear Lake Memorial Hospital

Idaho Business Review 2006 Health Care Heroes Awards

Bear Lake Memorial Hospital top honor as "Community Outreach Hero"

Cristy Transtrum, BLMH Director of Nursing Services, top honor as "Nurse Hero"

Bear Lake Valley Health Care Foundation, one of three honorees as "Foundation Hero"



Bear Lake County is a beautiful place to live. Despite long winters, the landscape provides the space and beauty that continue to attract people to the frontier. Along with clean air and water, residents count the sense of community among the major attributes of the Bear Lake lifestyle.

One of the biggest challenges facing communities in Bear Lake County is providing living wage jobs and adequate services for young workers and their families who want to stay in the area. Because young people are valued as an important asset to the strength and vitality of the community, organizations are working together offering scholarships, training and help for local businesses to expand, so youth have an opportunity to stay in the community.

## Bear Lake Memorial Hospital and Bear Lake Valley Health Care Foundation

Bear Lake Memorial Hospital had two predecessors, Montpelier Hospital from 1912 to 1945 and Bear Lake Hospital, from 1937 to 1949. With help from a county bond, a federal grant, and community donations, the current Hospital was opened in 1950.

### CREATING A MODERN HOSPITAL

By the 1990s, the forty year-old facility was no longer able to meet the health care needs of the community. In 1997 the Bear Lake Valley Health Care Foundation was established to raise financial support for needed renovations, modern facilities, and advanced technology.

The Hospital has been an enduring institution in the area, but establishing the Foundation was a declaration that no longer would it simply endure, but that it would excel, taking an active role in the health and vitality of the community.

### PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Emergency services are provided 24/7 through a partnership with the County-operated ambulance staffed by volunteer EMTs. The hospital has 21 inpatient beds, a 36 bed skilled nursing facility, a 24 bed assisted living center, 90 homes receiving home health care, and a seven chair dialysis center. There are two internal medicine/hospitalist doctors and one general surgeon, two operating rooms, a new CT scanner, complete digital imaging, and services provided by rotating specialists including ear, nose and throat, orthopedics, urology, and optometry services. The newest services include a sleep lab, cardiac rehabilitation and pain management programs. Three full-time family doctors are in private practice in offices on the Hospital campus. There are also three dentists in Montpelier. In addition to the impressive list of services and providers for physical health care, this unique frontier Hospital also provides a full array of mental health services.

Bear Lake Memorial Hospital offers an exceptional quality and diversity of care for any health care facility, let alone one in the frontier.

Public health services are provided by the Southeastern District Health Department, serving eight counties. The district has an office in Montpelier offering immunizations, the Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC), reproductive health care, environmental health services, and other public health programs.

### CREATING THE BEAR LAKE VALLEY HEALTH CARE FOUNDATION

The Foundation was established in 1997 with strong leadership from local residents enhanced by the guidance of KB Rasmussen, a longtime resident and community activist. Rasmussen recognized the importance of a Foundation to cement the role of the Hospital in the community. The Foundation's mission is to assist in the development, improvement, and expansion of the facilities and programs of Bear Lake Memorial Hospital and its Skilled Nursing Facility. A secondary purpose is to support community service initiatives and 'healthy community' activities.

The Foundation has been an essential partner in helping the Hospital meet its mission. Together with the Hospital, the Foundation has set an example for the revitalization of the Bear Lake community.

## exceptional community support

"Typically, a small hospital can count on about 35% of the health care dollars spent by the residents of the community being spent in their community hospital... For Bear Lake Memorial Hospital, the numbers are just reversed – 65% of the healthcare dollars spent by Bear Lake residents are spent at BLMH...That's most remarkable and very much appreciated. We hope to always deserve the confidence you place in us."

Rod Jacobson, Bear Lake Memorial Hospital Administrator  
*Health Watch 2005,*  
[www.blmhospital.com/resources/healthwatch.pdf](http://www.blmhospital.com/resources/healthwatch.pdf).





The community contributed a substantial amount of startup funds to the Foundation. The Montpelier Lion's Club organized a radiothon, which raised over \$350,000 in the first weekend. This outpouring of support is a testament to the partnership between the Hospital and community.

The Foundation provides grantwriting expertise and has been successful in raising general operating funds as well as funding for new technology and equipment. The Foundation was recently awarded a private grant from the MJ Murdock Charitable Trust for updated imaging equipment and the Hospital received a \$400,000 appropriation to remodel and expand the Skilled Nursing Facility.

Active volunteers participate in the Hospital auxiliary. Auxiliary members donate over 9,000 volunteer hours every year, raise close to \$65,000 a year through fundraising, and assure community support.

They operate a thrift shop, volunteer as Hospital support staff, run a quilting group, and organize several other community events.

## community data

**POPULATION 6,176**  
 (1,429,096 for all of Idaho)

- under 5 6.7%
- under 18 28.1%
- over 65 16.3%

**MEAN TRAVEL TIME TO WORK:**  
 21.3 minutes

**HOUSEHOLD DATA**

- 83.1% home ownership rate
- mean value of a housing unit is \$72,600
- 2259 households (as of 2000)
- average 2.81 persons per household
- average household income \$34,890
- 5.0% unemployment rate
- 9.60% of the population is below the poverty line:
  - 7.10% of families
  - 11.30% of people under 18
  - 15.6% of people 65 years and over

## innovative programs invest in staff for the future

### "GROW YOUR OWN" STAFF

Since opening its doors in 1950, the Hospital staff has grown from 30 to 230 employees.

To uphold its mission to be a large part of the economic life of the county, the Hospital has established several programs. The "grow your own" program is an innovative approach to the health professional shortages facing most frontier areas and the Hospital provides about \$60,000 a year in scholarships.

Idaho State University (ISU) offers both professional-level classes and training using distance learning technologies. Distance learning is also used to obtain various health care certifications. Forty-three people received nursing assistant certificates in 2005 alone.

Distance learning takes place in the Hospital's Health Information Center, a new wireless computer lab, funded in part by grants from Idaho Community Foundation, the Steele-Reese Foundation, and local donors. Besides distance learning for staff, the Center invites and supports people from the community doing health research and learning to use technology. The Foundation, through a \$20,000 grant from the Idaho Alliance of Leaders in Nursing, offers a no-interest loan program for Bear Lake Memorial Hospital nurses seeking higher levels in nursing.

### SCHOOL-BASED COOPERATIVE LEARNING

The Hospital and Bear Lake High School have teamed up to offer programs to provide skills and increase interest in the health field. A health careers class at the high school earns a certificate in phlebotomy and students shadow health care workers on their rounds. Students also use the high tech Health Information Center to take health related classes as well as other subjects not offered at the high school.

### HEALTHIER COMMUNITY GRANTS

To support a healthier lifestyle in the community, the Bear Lake Valley Health Care Foundation awards Healthier Community Grants. In 2005 nearly \$7,000 in grants funded projects as varied as downtown beautification, scholarships, and school playground rehabilitation. The Hospital also provides non-financial support, such as sending staff and Auxiliary volunteers to community meetings and publishing a monthly newsletter about prevention, wellness and other health issues.

Hospital employees register people for various prescription drug assistance programs and these have saved community members more than \$1,000,000 on medications.

Montpelier City Council member Chris Henderson obtained \$20,000 from the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare for drug abuse prevention and to assess the feasibility of developing a rehabilitation center. The city is working with the Hospital to expand community mental health services. As Henderson says, "It doesn't make sense to send people out of the community for help."

## DEVELOPING ECONOMIC ASSETS – THE GEM TEAM

In 1998 the Montpelier Gem Team was founded. The hospital's administrator was a founding member and continues to serve. The team used a statewide economic development model designed by the Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor in 1992 specifically for communities of fewer than 10,000 people.

The Montpelier Gem Team reactivated in 2004 developing a comprehensive six-point plan. Goals include expanding the capacity of existing business, growing the tourist industry, developing the local infrastructure to support growth and incorporating the Montpelier Community Foundation to be the fundraising entity for the Gem Team and the community at large.

The Gem Team has a strong grant writing and fundraising committee and partners with state agencies and regional organizations to bring resources into the community. Montpelier City Council partnered with its Chamber of Commerce to invest \$500,000 for downtown beautification and revitalization from the Southeast Idaho Council of Governments (SICOG). These funds are from a \$7 million revolving loan fund established to make capital more widely available to communities in the region.

## BUSINESS ASSISTANCE TEAM (BAT)

In addition to encouraging the tourist economy in Montpelier, the Gem Team improves existing businesses and facilitates projects using the assets and business expertise already in the community. The Gem Team established the Business Assistance Team (BAT) with representatives of the Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor, Utah Power, Intermountain Gas, Bear Lake Memorial Hospital, and other community leaders.

## DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDUSTRIAL PARK

The Gem Team, in collaboration with SICOG, applied for and was awarded a \$350,000 Community Development Block Grant for an industrial park. The City will lease-to-own the property to Southwest Stone, a local business that hopes to offer 35 new jobs in the expanded facility. The Gem Team works with other local businesses to foster expansions.

## BEAR LAKE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The Bear Lake Development Corporation (BLDC) has similar goals to the Montpelier Gem Team and works with them, however, the Corporation's community and economic development vision is countywide. Its mission statement says, "The Bear Lake Development Corporation will take the lead in identifying the valley's assets, connecting those assets, identifying opportunities and potentialities and then mobilizing those assets to produce a vibrant economy."

The Corporation recognizes the Hospital and other successful local business initiatives as strong, economic assets. The executive board of the Corporation represents the broad diversity of community including local business owners, county commissioners, city council members, business and Foundation executives, and the Hospital administrator.

## THE MONTPELIER COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Through the years, organizations in the Bear Lake area have used asset development skills, teamwork, and open communication to achieve a community vision. They have cultivated a strong culture of volunteerism that contributes thousands of hours every year. The community, agencies, organizations and businesses in the area have been amazingly effective at bringing outside monetary resources into the area and partnering with larger institutions for training and technical assistance.

To maintain these partnerships and bring in even more resources, the Montpelier Community Foundation was established, incorporated and designated a private, not for profit corporation under section 501(c)(3) by the IRS in 2005 with seed money from Bear Lake Valley Health Care Foundation. The purpose of the Foundation is to be the primary fundraising organization for the Gem Team and the City of Montpelier.

## THE BEAR LAKE REGIONAL COMMISSION

While the Bear Lake area has ambitious development goals, it has never lost sight of what makes the area attractive in the first place; natural beauty and recreation opportunities, great towns, good schools and a strong sense of community. The Bear Lake Regional Commission

## community giving grows the Health Care Foundation

The Bear Lake Valley Health Care Foundation raised over \$350,000 in community donations in a one day radiothon by the Foundation and the Montpelier Lions Club.

## hospital supports affordable housing

“Affordable housing is essential for the Hospital to be competitive in meeting future staffing needs. We have seen how housing prices have risen dramatically in Jackson, Wyoming and McCall, Idaho, sites of major recreational development.

Our Hospital supports the efforts of the Housing Coalition by providing information and participating in public hearings on planning and zoning for affordable housing.”

Craig Thomas, Bear Lake Memorial Hospital Public Relations Director



was established in 1973 as a bi-state, regional organization to help address local concerns about the impacts of the influx of tourists and development in the area.

The Commission is composed of ten representatives from the Utah and Idaho regional and state governments. Its purpose is to preserve the resources of the Bear Lake Valley, coordinate and facilitate public and private interests in the Valley, and help create a regional development plan based on the capacity and preservation of the environment.

## developing community assets

### AFFORDABLE HOUSING - BEAR LAKE HOUSING COALITION

Community leaders know that business development is futile without a thriving population. In addition to a shortage of jobs, a lack of affordable or functional housing may hinder recruitment and retention of skilled employees and prevent young families from staying or settling in the area. To address this problem, the City of Montpelier, the Bear Lake Valley Economic Development Corporation, and the Gem Team have partnered with the Southeast Idaho Committee Action Agency (SEICAA) to create the Bear Lake Housing Coalition to provide weatherization programs and housing assistance for both renters and potential homeowners.

The first project of the Housing Coalition was to conduct an assessment of housing needs and develop recommendations for action. After studying housing conditions and social and economic factors, it was concluded that the housing stock is in need of refurbishment, and that there is a housing mismatch, with elderly people living alone in large family homes and young families crowded into insufficient dwellings. There is also a lack of available capital for people to buy or build new houses.

To address the problems, the Housing Coalition has started a weatherization program and implemented a Mutual Self-Help Housing Program (MSHHP). The MSHHP is a USDA Rural Development program sponsored by the Idaho Housing and Finance Association, Community Frameworks and SEICAA. Together they administer the IdaMortgage loan program which helps low income and high risk borrowers get mortgages and own their own home.

The self-help program uses “sweat equity” to help low-income people achieve homeownership. In an innovative program, a group of six to ten applicants work together for fifteen months, under the supervision of a construction supervisor, building one another’s homes. No one moves in until all the homes are completed, and each person saves about 20 percent of total costs through their own labor. These homes also have lower monthly mortgage payments, making homeownership affordable to more people.

### PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROSPERITY

The Northwest Area Foundation (NWAf) was established in 1934 to serve an eight-state region in the northwest and its current mission is “Inspiring prosperity and change.” NWAf provides long-term support for reducing poverty through community revitalization, emphasizing initiatives that create leadership, encourage inclusiveness, recognize and develop community assets.

In 1998, NWAf awarded a \$600,000 planning grant to an Eastern Idaho, 16-county working group, including Bear Lake County. The working group invited a diverse group of people from all the communities to develop a ten-year plan for reducing poverty and creating prosperity.

The group defined poverty as a lack of resources and opportunities, being disenfranchised from various support systems (i.e., educational, economic, cultural, and social), and an inability to obtain these resources and opportunities. Prosperity is defined as the ability of all community members to have access to basic needs, community abundance, opportunity, positive development, and hope.

People shared their own stories of living in and struggling to get out of poverty. Quantitative and qualitative data were used to assess the need and recommend strategies. In December of 2003, the NWAf accepted the plan and the working group became Partners for Prosperity based in Pocatello and serving the 16-county region of southeast Idaho.

## CREATING SUCCESS THROUGH ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Bear Lake agencies completed an asset map in 2005 as the base for an important component of asset-based community development (ABCD). Asset mapping is the opposite of traditional “needs-assessment” development and focuses on a community’s current strengths and resources. Traditional economic development focuses on what a community lacks often leading local government and outside businesses to seek special deals like tax abatement and Industrial Revenue Bonds to entice businesses into the community.



The asset mapping team went door-to-door and completed 204 surveys of organizations, businesses and individuals throughout the county. Respondents gave their impressions of the community, their involvement in community, the level of volunteerism, the workforce, and partnerships among organizations. The survey documented a general concern for community and a large number of community volunteers. More than twenty-five percent of local organizations, including businesses, use volunteers. The survey pointed out where cooperation and communication were working and where they could be strengthened.

Asset mapping is important because it creates a holistic vision of community resources and a commitment to move forward with a unified mission.

### conclusion

Bear Lake County is an impressive model for frontier communities because it demonstrates what happens when a whole community comes together with effective leadership, a common vision and a strong sense of trust. Development is more stable because it is built on resources and commitment from the community and not from outside interests. Grow-your-own, bottom-up development is what the National Center for Frontier Communities calls economic health.

Communication is the key to creating partnerships and making progress. Bear Lake residents are working hard to fulfill their ambitions, integrate old and new, and assure that the whole community benefits from change. People have a deep pride in their community and sense of commitment to their neighbors and themselves.

Leadership provided by the Bear Lake Memorial Hospital and Bear Lake Valley Health Care Foundation is a key catalyst to the revitalization of the southeast corner of Idaho - proving once again that a small community can modernize and grow only with a strong health care system.

### helpful resources

REVOLVING LOAN FUNDS are an effective way to pool your community’s assets, helping people gain access to capital.  
<http://ohioline.osu.edu/cd-fact/1229.html>

RURAL BUSINESS ENTERPRISE GRANTS are part of the US Department of Agriculture Rural Business-Cooperative Service and provide funds to rural business initiatives.  
<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/id/rbeg.htm>

ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (ABCD) focuses on community strengths as opposed to deficiencies. To learn more about community assets go to  
<http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html>

ASSET MAPPING is an important community development strategy for frontier communities. For a basic overview of concepts and an introduction to mapping your community assets, see:  
<http://gearup.ous.edu/gusaccess/documents/pdf/BuildingCommunitiesInsideOut.pdf>  
[http://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/227/227\\_asset\\_mapping.pdf](http://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/227/227_asset_mapping.pdf)

MUTUAL SELF-HELP HOUSING PROGRAM offers information on how to start in your community:  
[http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/sfh/brief\\_selfhelpsite.htm](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/sfh/brief_selfhelpsite.htm)

### learn more:

#### BEAR LAKE

Bear Lake Memorial Hospital  
and The Bear Lake Valley Health  
Care Foundation  
164 S. 5th Street  
Montpelier, ID 83254  
208-847-1630

[www.blmhospital.com](http://www.blmhospital.com)

#### BEAR LAKE COUNTY

[www.bearlakecounty.info](http://www.bearlakecounty.info)

Bear Lake Regional Commission  
[www.bearlakeregionalcomission.org](http://www.bearlakeregionalcomission.org)

#### MONTPELIER

[www.montpelieridaho.info](http://www.montpelieridaho.info)

#### REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Northwest Area Foundation  
[www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org)

Partners for Prosperity  
[www.easternidahoprosperty.org](http://www.easternidahoprosperty.org)

Southeast Idaho Community  
Action Agency  
[www.seicaa.org](http://www.seicaa.org)

Southeast Idaho Council of  
Governments  
[www.sicog.org](http://www.sicog.org)

# f national center for frontier communities

The only national organization  
dedicated to the smallest and most  
geographically isolated communities  
in the United States—the frontier.

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## YOU CAN NOMINATE A MODEL COMMUNITY

Please contact the National Center for  
Frontier Communities by letter or email to  
nominate a model community for the  
*Innovations* project. Nominees should  
demonstrate leadership in both health care  
and the economic health of their  
community. All nominated communities  
will be listed on the Honor Roll posted at  
[www.frontierus.org](http://www.frontierus.org)

COVER AND BORDER PHOTOGRAPHS:  
Linda and Ross Walker, Montpelier, Idaho  
[www.hisandhersphoto.com](http://www.hisandhersphoto.com)

INSET PHOTOGRAPHS:  
Craig Thomas, Bear Lake Memorial Hospital

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