

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 17, 2017

Contact: Jody Rolnick
Community Relations Director
(541) 554-9131
jody.rolnick@slmh.org
www.slmh.org

South Lane Mental Health Executive Director To Retire

South Lane Mental Health's Board of Directors announces that Tom Wheeler, Executive Director of the Cottage Grove-based nonprofit mental health services organization for the past 25 years, has decided to retire, effective a year from now.

The Board of Directors has created a transition committee that will launch a nationwide search for Wheeler's successor. A new leader will be named later this year.

"Tom is a visionary and a trailblazer and will be difficult to replace," said Dr. Jim Harrison, Board Chair. "We are thankful for his many years of incredible leadership, nurturing and growing this organization to better help residents of our community."

South Lane Mental Health had a staff of five and served about 50 adults per year when Wheeler became its first executive director two and a half decades ago. Under his guidance, South Lane Mental Health secured state grants to build housing for adults with severe mental illness (1993); hired the first medically qualified individual in South Lane County with a specialty in managing psychiatric medications (1994); and became a contractor to provide mental health services to individuals on the Oregon Health Plan (1997). In 2008, South Lane Mental Health partnered with the City of Cottage Grove to win a Community Development Block Grant, which enabled the agency to buy and renovate its current 9,000-square-foot offices on Birch Avenue and expand programs and services.

Today, South Lane Mental Health employs more than 90 staff who provide an array of outpatient mental health services for more than 2,600 children and adults a year through programs for families, children, and adults — those with persistent mental illness as well as those who just need someone to talk to.

"Because of Tom's leadership, South Lane Mental Health has become a pivotal force both in Cottage Grove and in broader Lane County," said Noreen Dunnells, President and CEO of United Way of Lane County. "I've always been impressed with Tom's commitment to those in our community who are struggling. This is manifested in his enthusiastic involvement in initiatives like the Community Health Improvement Plan and Be Your Best Cottage Grove, as well as in making sure that local residents have timely access to mental health services."

South Lane Mental Health was established in 1988 by a group of First Presbyterian Church parishioners committed to ensuring local availability of services for residents with mental health challenges. The organization's mission is to restore hope and renew lives through compassionate mental health services, support, and advocacy. A guiding principal is to ensure mental health services to anyone who asks for help, regardless of their insurance or financial status.

To learn more about South Lane Mental Health, visit www.slmh.org.

###

ATTENTION MEDIA:

- Jim Harrison can be reached at (541) 337-5206 or jimh22854@gmail.com
- Tom Wheeler can be reached at (541) 767-4195 or tom.wheeler@slmh.org