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Published February 13, 2010

St. Peter wins recognition

THE OLYMPIAN

Thumbs up: St. Peter Hospital

Providence St. Peter Hospital recently joined the ranks of the top 4 percent of hospitals in the nation by earning “Magnet” recognition from the American Nurses Credentialing Center. The recognition program honors the top health care organizations in the nation for providing nursing excellence. Only two other hospitals in Washington — the University of Washington and Seattle Children’s Hospital — have earned the honor. Medrice Coluccio, chief executive officer of the east Olympia hospital said, “Achieving ‘Magnet’ status is a measurable outcome of our staff’s dedication to innovative and compassionate care of our patients, their families and the communities they serve.” She said St. Peter Hospital has been developing its case for achieving the Magnet level for the past six years. The work includes an evaluation of nursing policies, practices and procedures to ensure they are consistent with national standards. In addition, the process includes a three-day site visit from the American Nurses Credentialing Center. The Magnet surveyors interview patients, hospital staff and community representatives to assess the quality of nursing care delivered by Providence nurses, according to a hospital press release. Connie Huber, chief nursing officer at St. Peter, led the effort to apply for and achieve the award. Huber said it has been a privilege to represent the 877 nurses at the hospital. “Every day, they touch the hearts of our patients and our community with their skill and caring,” Huber said.

Thumbs down: Ethics lapse

It’s not a huge scandal, but seven lawmakers and a state Senate staff member must pay back a portion of their per diem for free sandwiches they ate at a luncheon featuring international travel adviser Rick Steves last October. Steves, who supports decriminalizing marijuana possession, says travel can help people learn about how other cultures address social problems, which can help in the creation of better public policies related to health care, drug laws and other issues. About \$50 of public money was spent on posters publicizing the talk, and Steves gave out copies of a travel book he wrote, the legislative ethics board found. The panel dropped the complaint filed by Lacey resident Rob Kavanaugh. At the luncheon, The American Civil Liberties Union, which supports decriminalizing marijuana, provided free lunches. Lawmakers who ate the lunches must give back a portion of their “per diem” — their daily spending allowance that amounts to \$90 per day. Two senators and a staffer will be repaying the state \$18 each while the five House members must repay \$9.50 each. House and Senate administrative leaders say they are taking the unusual step of demanding the paybacks only because Kavanaugh has complained so vigorously. “It’s not an ethics issue with the ethics law. It’s a matter of them being reimbursed for something they’re not entitled to,” Secretary of the Senate Tom

Hoemann said. The House did a more formal, lengthy investigation of the cost of a box lunch — including a drink and cookie — before deciding on a cost of \$9.50, House counsel Tim Sekerak said. The ethics board formally tossed Kavanaugh's complaint, finding there was no reason to think the ethics in public service act was violated. The lesson here is lawmakers and staff members who take per diem payments must be extra cautious when accepting and accounting for free meals.

Thumbs up: Composting

A dozen South Sound schools participate in Thurston County's Food to Flowers program, which recycles leftover food, napkins and other compost-worthy materials from lunch trays. It's a great way to teach young people about the advantages of composting — skills that can last them a lifetime. "The program has changed the way these kids think about the planet and the food they eat," said fifth-grade teacher Susie Hayes. Since launching the program at Michael T. Simmons Elementary in Tumwater in December, the school has diverted an average of 90 percent of the lunchroom food waste and other recyclables that used to be sent to the landfill, school officials said. That, too, is a great lesson for youngsters and a savings to taxpayers. The organic waste is collected and sent to Silver Springs Organics, a Tenino-area commercial composting plant that turns the lunch waste into a natural soil amendment. "The next step is to bring the compost back and use it on the school grounds," parent volunteer Darin Rice said. The Food to Flowers program is operated by the county Solid Waste Department and began at Tumwater Hill Elementary School in April 2008. Since, it has spread to 11 other schools countywide. Collectively, these schools have diverted more than 60 tons of organics and other recyclables from disposal.