

JAN 28 2007

Allen's P. C. B. Est. 1888



DAVID  
SARASONN

5036

UNINSURED  
CHILDREN  
Rural kids  
plowed under  
by growing gap  
in health care

**F**or a lot of people in the far reaches of northeast Oregon, health care doesn't work the way it does on the TV doctor shows.

"People don't go until they have to go, then they go to emergency rooms, which can't turn them away," explains Amy Yardley. When a problem first comes up, "People don't want to reconfigure their entire month's budget to see a doctor."

Yardley works for an organization called Covering Kids and Families in Union, Baker and Wallowa counties, out where Oregon sticks into Idaho. The organization works to connect people to the Oregon Health Plan, but she sees a lot of folks falling through holes in the safety net, a lot of people getting treated later than they should, then having trouble recovering medically and financially.

And even with her efforts to connect kids who qualify for free and reduced-cost lunches with medical programs, it means kids drag medical problems along into adulthood.

Last week, Children First for Oregon, together with Regence Blue-Cross BlueShield, issued its 2006 State of Oregon's Children County Data Book, its annual study of how kids are doing here. This one focuses on health care, and there's a map on Page 10 that casts a whole different light on the state's natural resources.

Across the state, 12.3 percent of Oregon kids don't have health insurance, a number that has actually risen lately, shooting above the national average. But the farther you get from urban Oregon, the faster that number rises. According to the 2004 Oregon Population Survey in the counties from Wasco east along the gorge, it rose to 15 percent; in

south-central Oregon to 19 percent; and on the state's eastern edge, where Amy Yardley sees it, the survey made it 26 percent.

According to Robin Christian, executive director of Children First for Oregon, in Oregon's rural areas children are more than twice as likely to be uninsured for some of the year than in the state as a whole.

All across the state, untreated kids who don't make it to school — or who wander in worrying more about their asthma than their algebra — erode our investment in education and economic development.

Please see SARASONN, PageE2

Across the state, 12.3 percent of Oregon kids don't have health insurance, a number that has actually risen lately, shooting above the national average. But the farther you get from urban Oregon, the faster that number rises