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NEWS RELEASE

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**BEAR LAKE COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$6.4 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Bear Lake County residents and businesses received \$6.4 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 6,300 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Bear Lake County ranks number 12 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars. The county ranked 27 in per capita outlay in 2003.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$1,018 for every man, woman and child residing in Bear Lake County, an increase from \$698 per capita in 2003. Nearly all of the increase was due to more Medicaid spending. Per capita spending figures include citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department distributed \$1.15 billion in 2004 statewide in Idaho communities. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Bear Lake County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive and less burden on society. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at the local hospital, and dozens of other badly needed services."

“This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing,” adds Kurtz. “By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn’t just me pounding my chest. That’s what community leaders tell us.”

Bear Lake County Commission Chairman Dwight Cochran says, “This (investment) is very important to us. The county hospital is asking for money all the time. Our nursing home is need of repair. I don’t think the nursing home would make it without that (Medicaid) money. I see a lot of people who need that kind of help.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$5.5 million on health care for residents of the county — a \$2 million increase over the previous year. A large share of those dollars went to pharmacies like Bear Lake Drug in Montpelier. “We rely on (Medicaid) a lot in a small town like this,” says owner Dean Wallentine. “It is at least a third or half of my business. The money goes to help pay the pharmacy techs. I also put in a new parking lot last year and it helped pay for that.”

The story is much the same at Bear Lake Memorial Hospital which received nearly \$233,000 in extra Medicaid payments called Federal Upper Payment Limits and Disproportionate Share. The payments are on top of the more than \$600,000 the hospital received in payment for patient services. “We’re putting those (extra) payments away,” says Hospital Administrator Rod Jacobson. “We’re remodeling our 30-year-old nursing home. It’s a \$2 million improvement, so we’ve been saving everything we can for that. It wouldn’t have gotten done without it, that’s for sure.” The remodeling began in June 2005.

Bear Lake County residents received \$316,800 in Food Stamps to feed their families in 2004 — an increase of \$65,000 and 66 people over 2003. Broulim’s in Montpelier — which added Peterson’s Jubilee Foods to its seven-store group in March — redeemed most of it, totaling \$269,900.

Store Director Brad Tueller says this money is “very, very important” to them, about 4.5 percent of the store’s \$6 million annual income. Does it help to create jobs? “I would say so,” he says. “This money helps us with our total volume. Every little bit helps,” he notes, as they deal with the big neighborhood competition, Wal-Mart stores in Chubbuck, Idaho, and Logan, Utah.

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz says, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. The dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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(Editors: Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director Nick Arambarri at 239-6280 for more information.)

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investment in every Idaho County
can be found online at
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**