

## **Georgia man earns top job at meth center**

Gov. Schweitzer to headline dignitaries at opening ceremony  
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The clinical director of a Georgia health facility has been named to the top job at the Nexus Methamphetamine Treatment Center, which will open in Lewistown on June 1.

Mike Thatcher, chief executive officer of Community, Counseling and Correctional Services Inc., the Butte-based firm which built and will operate the center at the Lewistown Municipal Airport, said Don Schroeder will be the facility's program administrator.

Thatcher said an open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held at the center on Wednesday, May 30. Gov. Brian Schweitzer (D-Mont.) will head the list of dignitaries who plan to be on hand for the ceremony, Thatcher said.

The 80-bed residential treatment facility is scheduled to take its first offenders on June 1. The program will serve adult male offenders and will include a comprehensive array of correctional programming and services, he said.

Schroeder will be relocating to Lewistown later this month from Statesboro, Ga., where he previously worked as the clinical director of the Savannah Area Behavioral Health Collaborative.

Schroeder received his bachelor of science degree in psychology from the University of Illinois at Urbana and his master's degree in clinical psychology from the University of Illinois in Springfield.

He is currently pursuing a second master's degree in health services administration. He has published several papers and presented at numerous conferences, Thatcher said.

Guests of honor at the open house and ribbon cutting ceremony, in addition to the governor, will include Mike Ferriter, director of the Department of Corrections, Sen. Jim Peterson (R-Buffalo) and other community leaders who were instrumental in bringing the \$10 million center to Lewistown.

Local business and civic leaders are pleased about the planned opening of the meth treatment center. This is something several have worked on for years.

Bret Carpenter, vice chairman of the Fergus County Port Authority, was among those instrumental in bringing the meth treatment center to Lewistown.

"Time goes quickly. All of a sudden here it is coming," said Carpenter. "What started out four years ago, now it is reality. They (CCCS) have done everything they said they would to this point.

"They made an investment here, they bought a house here and they are giving every indication they want to be a long-term partner in the community. They are paying for more of the infrastructure (water and sewer) at the airport than planned. They didn't have to do it.

"There's a lot of talk in community on the employment side, the jobs, the benefits. There may be a chance to grow this business if our community wants it."

Lewistown City Manager Kevin Myhre was another who helped bring the meth center to Lewistown. He said, "It is a great feeling to see it coming to completion."

Myhre said the meth center will benefit the economy and bring jobs to the community.

"It is a great accomplishment for the Port Authority and will be a benefit for Central Montana," Myhre said. He said he heard that 14 families will be moving to Lewistown because of the meth center, "and that means more children in our schools, more people buying things in Lewistown."

The city manager said he is aware that the influx of this many people will add to the city's housing crunch. But, he said, for there to be investment in more subdivisions and more housing there has to be a shortage like this. He said eventually housing will catch up with the need.

One provision of the meth treatment center proposal was that a community panel would be established to review offenders who will be brought here. The purpose was to be sure that individuals who might be a danger to the community would not be brought here.

"I have not heard who will be members of the community panel to screen people coming here," said Carpenter. "I know they want a cross section from the community, law enforcement, probation, Port Authority members, others."

Thatcher said he has filled most of the 44 positions available at the center. He said he could not announce the others at this point because some still have to make arrangements with their current employers to make the move here.

Carpenter said he had heard that several in Lewistown got jobs at the center.

Thatcher said Schroeder's duties will include coordination of the local screening committee to ensure that clients are suitable for this type of treatment, managing the staff at the facility, educating the community and the state about the Nexus program and many other duties ensuring that the clients receive the best treatment possible.

In an interview by phone on Thursday, Schroeder said he is "looking forward to the challenge and I'm excited to have a new staff coming in.

"It's very exciting for me. I'm originally from a town of 350 people south of Chicago. I flew up to Lewistown about a month ago. It was warmer in Lewistown than in Savannah, when I went there.

"I don't expect to have trouble adjusting to life in Montana. I'm an outdoors person. I love to hunt and fish," Schroeder said.

Thatcher said, "Schroeder is looking forward to the challenge of opening the new program, training the new staff and ensuring that quality treatment is delivered to the clients, all the while adjusting to life in Montana."

The CCCS chief said the type of treatment anticipated at the Lewistown center "focuses on multi-dimensional/holistic change in the areas of abstinence, social responsibility, right living and moral development.

"Traits that are emphasized in the therapeutic community model are honesty, personal responsibility and accountability, economic self-reliance, community involvement and good citizenship."

Thatcher praised Gov. Schweitzer and the 2005 Montana Legislature for having the "farsightedness" to approve and fund the center. He also saluted Sen. Peterson for introducing the bill that resulted in approval of state meth treatment in such a center.

"Without Peterson's bill and support from both sides of the legislative aisle we wouldn't be one step closer to addressing the devastating and costly effects associated with meth addiction," Thatcher said.

He also noted that the center would not have come to Lewistown without the encouragement and support of the people of Lewistown. He said several groups were instrumental in bringing the facility to Lewistown including the Port Authority, the Lewistown Airport Board, Snowy Mountain Development Corp. and city and county officials.

“We would like to welcome the citizens of Montana to the grand opening and ribbon cutting. There will be tours of the new facility as well as refreshments served throughout the day,” said Thatcher.