

Legislators pass mental health resolution

by Jessica Wierzbinski
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A resolution recognizing the vital role played by mental health centers was approved Feb. 10 by Colorado legislators.

West Central Mental Health Center personnel said recently awareness of mental health issues was raised during a meeting with state lawmakers including Rep. Tom Massey (R-Poncha Springs).

"There was more overall awareness and support of mental health than we have ever seen among legislators," Kay Martin, chief operating officer at West Central Mental Health Center, said.

"Legislators are recognizing importance of community mental health services and that maintaining financing for those services makes good fiscal sense."

Numerous state representatives addressed legislators about importance of not cutting financing that would eliminate mental health and substance abuse treatment.

They emphasized mental health services are saving Colorado tax dollars by keeping individuals out of expensive emergency rooms and jails while receiving treatment they need locally.

The resolution said "persons with mental health and substance abuse disorders who have access to local ... preven-

tion, intervention and treatment are much less likely to require more expensive alternatives of hospitalization or incarceration, and chances of becoming homeless are greatly reduced."

Gwen Johnson, West Central Mental Health spokeswoman, said, "Integrated health care is the future of the health care industry and it is about treating the whole person."

The resolution is significant, Johnson said, "because not only are people having open discussions about mental health and mental illness which helps reduce stigma, but they are recognizing health is mind and body."