

Getting Down to Business with Jim Peterson

By Cody Hooks The Taos News | Posted: Tuesday, March 17, 2015 12:00 am

Jim Peterson is the founder and principal at Headwaters Management Solutions, a consulting firm that helps with efficiency and vision at a local fly fishing shop and the organization over most of the local health care industry. As a 34-year-old businessperson and former leader within the Air Force who found a new career in health care only two years ago, Peterson sat down with The Taos News to share his thoughts about keeping Taos healthy and shoring up our health care infrastructure.

Where are you from? How'd you get to Taos?

I grew up in the military moving all over the place, all over the United States. I went to college and flew in the Air Force for about 10 years. A friend of mine had a house in [TSV] while I was flying B1s in Texas. That's how I got introduced to Taos. I just kept coming back to fish and ski. That's why I'm here, because I love this place. When I decided to get out of the military and figure out what to do with myself, finding a job was very difficult.

What is your job now?

I've got three jobs actually. I started the fall of 2012 working with Van Beachum at the Solitary Angler, doing some business development and marketing, and guiding a little bit on the side. That was an interesting way to integrate myself in the community. As I got to know more and more people, I learned about an opportunity at [Taos Community Health Plan]. I had some pretty substantial leadership experience from the Air Force. I got that job and it's turned into a whole new career.

What is the Taos Community Health Plan?

It includes the hospital, Taos Medical Group, Family Practice Associates of Taos, Taos Orthopedic Institute, Taos Clinic for Children and Youth, some other organizations and about 100



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Jim Peterson, photographed Monday (March 9), is the founder and principal at Headwaters Management Solutions.

physicians and clinicians. My main responsibility aside from keeping the organization on track is negotiating contracts with insurance companies.

So what about your consulting business, Headwaters Management Solutions?

I rolled the health care job and Solitary Angler into one consulting firm I'm trying to expand a little more. I always had a knack for change management. [In the Air Force] I got in a couple of situations where the offices needed some help addressing ways to change and innovate and be more efficient. I had some great successes. I wanted another opportunity to do that.

So what are some of the biggest changes happening in Taos' health care system at the moment?

Obviously the Affordable Care Act is a huge issue. There are a lot of paradigm shifts going on related to the concept of outcomes-based medicine verses volume-based medicine. Volumes-based is what we have now, "fee-for-service" is the buzz word. You go to the doctor because you have a cold ... that doctor gets paid for each thing he or she does. The way to make more money is to do more of that. Now that's not necessarily the most efficient way to do things in the health care world. We started looking at that here as an opportunity to save money, and work with insurance companies on reimbursement structure that rewards physicians and the hospital for making people healthier.

That seems somewhat complex ...

It can be complex. It requires some significant data and data-analysis needs. We lack a common data repository and a way to track — not individuals per se — but track health information in a way that allows doctors and hospitals to be more efficient, like not ordering the same test twice. It's true industry-wide that it's a problem. There's places like Grand Junction, Colorado, that have tackled reducing costs just looking at testing and being more efficient with what tests they ask for and perform. They don't duplicate efforts.

So as you're looking at instituting paradigm shifts in Taos, where are you getting your cues from?

There are other communities around that have been successful with this kind of concept. They're not a perfect translation, mainly because of the population they serve and the amount of resources available in their locations. [A Colorado practice] is successful with pay-for-performance initiatives for years because they have the ability to help physicians think differently, and because they've built an enormous IT system. And that IT system is probably the cornerstone of their success, and that's why we can't do exactly what they do. Yet.

What's it going to take for Taos to get to that place for us to have an anchoring system?

It's a lot of money just in hardware, software and the employees to run something like that. The bigger challenge is getting access to the raw data from the electronic medical record vendors. They don't necessarily talk to each other the way we think would be simple with the Internet. The vendors can charge a lot of money to get access to that data. There's a lot of steps along the way before we are able to do that.

Does Taos have a master plan for this IT system?

There was a lot of effort and hope put into the New Mexico Health Information Exchange. It makes a lot of sense for us to move in our own independent direction faster. By that I mean having our own IT system and our own analytics rather than waiting on some other group. We've defined the problem. We're always looking for the next opportunity to do better.

What are some other challenges and barriers in terms of having a robust health care system in a rural, isolated place?

The good news is we have so many talented physicians and people in the medical community. They're good at what they do, but they are also very open minded and willing to move in a non-traditional direction. It's unique; there are so many health systems around the county that are extremely resistant to change and that makes population management very difficult.

We also have socio-economic challenges that are unique to rural areas, especially in New Mexico, and that can make things difficult from a financial perspective when it comes to the business of health care — who has insurance and who doesn't. The portion of folks who are uninsured in Taos ... it's generally higher. And that's true in rural areas all over the country. There's also groups of people within the uninsured sector who could be, but they aren't and they choose not to be. And that's kind of a big challenge for especially the hospital.

Why would they do that?

All kinds of personal reasons. One of the things is people don't want to be tracked.

I don't know why else you wouldn't want to be covered when it's available to you and in many cases it's free to you. It helps the community because it helps the physicians and it helps the hospital stay viable.

Where's the intersection of health care, a healthy population and economic development?

There's some huge numbers related to health care costs in Taos, upwards of \$100 million a year. That, I think, is something that should be embraced. The community needs a better understanding of what the [local] economic impact of health care is. It's not just going to the doctor and paying your \$30 copay — what does it mean in the grand scheme of things? How much money is leaving Taos to where the insurance companies are headquartered? What is that going to look like in 10 or

15 years when people are spending \$300 and up to \$1,000 a month that probably would have been spent locally. It is a major problem economically. That might not be the case in a place like Albuquerque with a stronger middle class and companies based in that metro area.

Can you tell me about the six-month Presidential Leadership Scholars program you're involved in?

That [executive education] program is amazing. I don't want to leave Taos and I don't have the time to do that and what I'm doing. It fit perfectly with my lifestyle, my jobs. It was put together by the Clinton Foundation [and three other presidential centers]. The program focuses on leadership and it teaches leadership from presidential examples. Their focus is on self-awareness, coalition building, and negotiation techniques and strategies.

Getting Down to Business is a weekly Q & A exploration of business, economics and community development in Taos — who does it, what they do and where they think we're all going. If you'd like to nominate an economically minded Taoseño or Taoseña, email chooks@taosnews.com.