

'Meet people where they are'

LUCAS mobile screening unit on the road in Preston County

BY JIM BISSETT

JBissett@DominionPost.com

FAIRMONT – Just ask Peggy Cooley: LUCAS saves lives.

That's the name of the mobile diagnostic lab on

wheels operated by West Virginia University's Cancer Institute.

LUCAS (a loose acronym of "Lung Cancer Screening") regularly visits 42 of the state's 55

counties. On Friday, it will be parked in Preston County at the Rowlesburg Clinic and at the Cranberry Medical Clinic in Terra Alta.

The lab on Nov. 25 sets

up in Marion County, at the Fairmont location of Milan Puskar Health Right on Locust Avenue.

Visit WVUCancer.org/LUCAS or call 304-293-2370

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Submitted photo

Last year, 1,778 were screened for lung cancer through the WVU Medicine LUCAS unit, resulting in nine positive diagnoses of the disease. LUCAS is parked in Preston County this week.

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to make an appointment and to learn more.

The 48-foot LUCAS trailer is hauled by a semitruck outfitted with CT scanning technology and other diagnostic equipment designed to catch that one cell, as it were, that can morph into cancer.

LUCAS first hit the road years ago at the height of COVID-19.

The motoring motivation then was easy, said Albert L. Wright Jr., who is president and CEO of the West Virginia University Health System – and it was just as much about

location as it was contagion.

Translation: In the Mountain State, it's not always an easy trek to get from here to there, pandemic or otherwise.

"We need to meet people where they are," Wright said, "rather than have them travel to us for their care."

That makes for critical, clinical navigating, he said.

Every two minutes or so, someone in the U.S. learns they have lung cancer, according to the American Cancer Association – and a total of 361 die daily from the disease.

In West Virginia, more

than 2,000 people a year get that same diagnosis.

And last year alone, there were 1,778 lung cancer screenings offered through LUCAS alone across its 42-county region – with nine positive diagnoses made.

One of them was Peggy Cooley, a Lewis County grandmother who smoked cigarettes for 21 years before giving up the habit.

A number of her relatives also smoked, and had also suffered from lung cancer, and that's what she was breathing in when she saw the familiar blue trailer set up in a local parking lot in her hometown that

summer day.

Cooley turned her car around on impulse and pulled into the lot.

She hadn't torn the cellophane off a pack of cigarettes in years, but she was still thinking about all that smoke – and all her relatives.

A week later, WVU surgeons removed the spot on her lung via robotic surgery.

Now, she isn't shy about letting her neighbors know about LUCAS.

She wants them to also stop when they too spy the trailer.

"You're in and out in five minutes. It's that simple."