

Therapist: laughter best

United Press International

SEATTLE — Robin Faye-McNair has several prescriptions for her psychiatric patients at University Hospital — drawing cartoons, watching soap operas and wearing Halloween masks.

The occupational therapist firmly believes in the old saying that laughter is the best medicine, especially when it comes to healing emotional wounds.

"I think humor helps because you can look at different areas of your life without making it so serious," Faye-McNair said. "It allows people to relax a little bit and open up."

Faye-McNair, who is an amateur cartoonist, encourages her patients to express their feelings by drawing cartoons, which she says makes it easier for them to discuss and cope with their problems.

"Sometimes it's kind of hard to express emotions and things that people keep hidden," she said, adding that patients who can sketch their feelings in cartoon form "don't feel as threatened."

For patients who have difficulties with interpersonal relationships, Faye-McNair turns to episodes of

the daytime soap opera "One Life to Live." After patients watch a show, they discuss the characters and how they manipulate one another.

"Soap operas are ... so extreme it borders on humor," Faye-McNair said. "They help patients see they're acting out a role. It allows them to see options or other ways of behavior."

She also has a collection of Halloween-type masks, with expressions ranging from sad to angry to happy, and encourages patients to wear a face that depicts their mood that day.

Patients who benefit from her special brand of therapy are suffering from a range of mental problems, including anorexia, depression or low self-esteem. Because each patient has specific needs, Faye-McNair says approaching problems from the bright side doesn't always work — at least not right away.

"I sort of see myself as planting some seeds," she said. "If it's done in a way that gives people the opportunity (to be humorous), but doesn't force them, they may take up on it later."

One patient who blossomed under Faye-McNair's approach was

DeeDee Murry, 23, who entered the program in October 1983 suffering from anorexia nervosa.

"When I first came I wasn't very receptive," Murry said. "I had a lot of trouble in showing emotions. The humor group was very good for me."

After 14 weeks of treatment, Murry left the hospital early this year and now returns once a week as an outpatient. But she believes she is well along the road to recovery, and attributes much of her progress to the humorous approach.

Looking at things with a smile comes naturally to Ms. Faye-McNair. "Humor has always been a big coping mechanism in my family," she said.

Not everyone uses humor properly, she noted, recalling a patient who had such a sarcastic attitude that her humor was lost on everyone else around her.

Through therapy, however, the patient started using the humorous approach Faye-McNair said.

By sharing her coping skills with others, Faye-McNair believes she is helping people "to use their humor and to see when it's getting in the way."

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Fire-stricken Montana gets help; weather, winds ease

United Press International

HELENA, Montana — Cooler temperatures and lighter winds gave an army of more than 5,000 firefighters a chance Wednesday to contain some of the blazes that have already blackened 150,000 of acres of timber and grassland across much of Montana.

Of the thousands of professional and volunteer firefighters battling the blazes, only one serious injury has been reported to date — a firefighter seriously burned three days ago and sent to a hospital in Salt Lake City.

While ground crews had two major range fires in the southeast corner of the state nearly encircled, airplanes and helicopters loaded with retardant were being used to hold the line on some of the 16 other major fires burning in virtually every other part of the tinder-dry state since the weekend.

Great clouds of smoke continued to pour from the 22,140-acre North Hill Fire north of Helena, but none of the homes on the northern fringe of the state capital evacuated earlier in the week were immediately threatened.

"Their south line is holding well," said Paula Walker of the governor's office, "but they do have planes standing by to drop water and retardant if they think the fire will threaten homes."

Homeowners near Roundup in the central part of the state were not so lucky escaping the wrath of the state's biggest blaze — the 75,000-acre Hawk Creek Fire north of Billings.

"Our damage assessment people are out taking a look at things," said Margaret Spiker of the Red Cross. "It may be 70 homes in all. Not all of them have been destroyed, but a good majority of them have."

Among those to lose their homes in the heavily damaged Bull Mountain area about 30 miles north of Billings were Jo and Curtis Ellis.

"At our place, the wind was so high and the heat of the fire was so intense that it made a storm ahead of it and combusted the trees across the highway," said Mrs. Ellis. "That was what was so horrible."

Some homeowners had to contend with looters before the embers had even cooled. Mark Clark said he confronted four uninvited visitors to his property during the night.

"I hid next to the truck and they turned off the lights as they got in the yard," Clark said. "They got out of the outfit and started for the house. When I yelled at them, they backed off and said they were just checking to see if everyone was safe. I know they had pillaging on their minds."

The massive Hawk Creek Fire was still moving Wednesday, but fire officials said the pace had been slowed greatly and no additional homes were in immediate danger.

"Up until now, they've been using retardant just to protect homes and barns," said John Gibson of the Interagency Fire Center. "Now, the winds have subsided some — not a great deal — but they'll start using it (retardant) on the fires," Gibson said.

The aircraft helped bolster the ef-

forts of a multi-agency firefighting crew combined of local volunteers and experienced fire crews from California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Alaska.

"They're moving in so fast now that I don't think anybody knows for sure exactly how many (firefighters) there are," Gibson said.

Though warmer temperatures and higher winds were forecast again for later in the week, fire officials were looking Wednesday to contain the 11,250-acre Pine Hills Fire in the southeast corner of the state, as well as the 2,500-acre Wheat Well located just to the south.

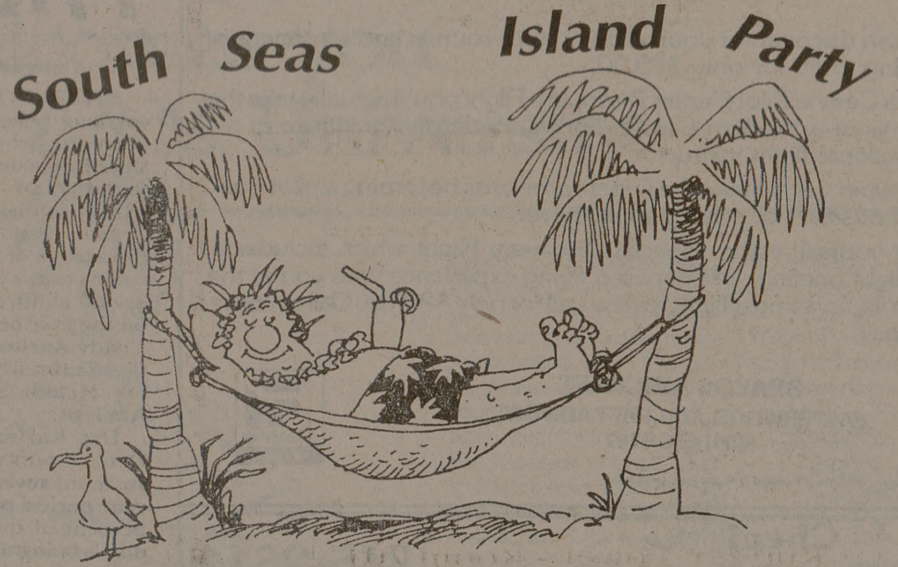
Still giving firefighters trouble 450 miles to the northwest was the Houghton Creek Fire between Libby and Kalispell, although an earlier estimate of it having blackened 20,000 acres was downgraded Wednesday to 10,900 acres.

Nearly 300 people living south of Libby were evacuated because of the fire, which destroyed two homes and closed a portion of U.S. highway 2.

Another big fire was the 12,800-acre Mount Centennial Fire near the Rocky Boys Indian Reservation in north central Montana, while the Napi Peak Fire had blackened about 3,500 acres near the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

National disaster declarations issued earlier in the week made federal funds available to fight the Hawk Creek, North Hill and Houghton Creek fires.

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