

Whitefish Community Center keeps busy



Matt Baldwin / Whitefish Pilot

Marianne Dyon and Jerrel Hudson prepare to deliver Meals On Wheels packages from the Whitefish Community Center on Tuesday.

By RICHARD HANNERS
Whitefish Pilot

It's official — the board of directors of the former senior center on the Whitefish River at the Second Street bridge have changed their nonprofit's name from the Whitefish Golden Agers to the Whitefish Community Center.

The goal is to make the center a gathering place for the entire community, center president Mike Kinne says. That means not only providing services for seniors but providing classroom space for Flathead Valley Community College, hosting arts and crafts classes, and offering a rental facility for weddings, family reunions and other social occasions.

They even offer free refreshments, doughnuts and Wi-Fi on Monday through Friday from 9:30 to 11 a.m.

In the first 10 months this year, staff and volunteers at the Whitefish Community Center served 3,558 lunches, delivered 4,637 Meals On Wheels, prepared 163 free

tax returns and offered 10 hours of health and social activities each week.

The center has two paid site managers. Maura Morberg, who hired on in 2004, works five hours a day for four days a week. Marianne Dyon works five hours a day one day a week. With 204 members, Whitefish Community Center volunteers worked 3,620 hours.

The idea of the name change has been in the works for several years. The center itself underwent a name change last year after members said they wanted the facility to play a larger role in the community and because, as former president Jerrel Hudson explained last year, "they didn't want to be called seniors."

Part of that growing community role is the center's partnership with FVCC. Three continuing education classes were held at the center this past spring — "Sing & Learn Spanish," "Preserving Your Family

Heritage" and "Fly-Casting Techniques." A low-cost monthly arts and crafts class taught by Jennifer Griffith started in November, and a community quilting workshop takes place on the second Monday of the month.

Several wellness classes are also held at the center. "Balancing Act" continues to be taught by a licensed physical therapist from the Whitefish Sport Center, and "Yoga For Healthy Aging" was added this year.

Walter Sayre, the former president of the Stumptown Historical Society, holds his popular "History of Whitefish" talks at the center, with a new topic each month for stories and remembrances. And the North Valley Toastmaster meet at the center each Wednesday from 7-8 a.m.

"As a small nonprofit, fundraising is never far from our minds," Kinne said. "Keeping the center 'in the black' is always a challenge."

The Whitefish Community Center teamed

up again with the Humane Society of Northwest Montana to present its "Fashion For Compassion" fashion show in May, featuring models of all ages — human and canine.

The annual Oktoberfest continues to be the center's biggest fundraiser event, and the center recently initiated a new direct-mail fundraising program. They also receive in-kind donations for printing their newsletter and credit at Nelson's Ace Hardware.

A generous grant from the Flathead Electric Cooperative's Round-Up For Safety program paid for motion-detector exterior lighting. Wright's Furniture has offered free expertise on interior decorating and painting supplies. The center's exterior was painted earlier this year with half the cost covered by a grant from the Plum Creek Foundation.

"We also incurred some unexpected maintenance expenses," Kinne said. "When replacing the floor in our rest rooms, plumbing problems were discovered, and what we thought would be a simple floor replacement turned into a whole lot more."

Kinne reports that the center's operating budget is facing a shortfall this year.

"It's a moving target, but it's about \$1,400 right now," he said.

Renting out the center for social functions could help them cover the gap. Rates are \$400 per day for wedding receptions and family reunions; \$200 for funeral receptions and birthdays; and \$100 to \$200 for meetings. All prices are subject to change depending on the size of groups.

This year, the center was rented out for three weddings, three family reunions, two birthdays and one memorial service. It was also used by the Census Bureau six times and by the Environmental Protection Agency once.

Other uses included a 50s and 60s Sock Hop, two Soroptimist dinners, a Memorial Day bridge tournament, a fundraiser for the Glacier Country Avalanche Center, a backcountry skiing lecture by Greg Hill and Christmas parties for the

U.S. Border Patrol and the Whitefish Walkers.

"We think we've got a great facility," Kinne said. "We just need to get the word out."

For more information about the Whitefish Community Center, visit online at www.whitefish-communitycenter.org, call them at 862-4923, e-mail them at whitefishcommunitycenter@montanasky.net, or drop by their office at 121 East Second Street on Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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