

Smelter City Seniors

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A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION PRODUCED BY THE ANACONDA LEADER

JULY 2024

Lift Up The Legion



*They served their country. They've served our community.
Now let's serve them.*

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The Anaconda
Leader

Lifting up the Legion: They served their country, they've served our community, now let's serve them

JAMES S. ROSIEN
EDITOR

Smelter City Seniors is a publication dedicated to the senior citizens of Anaconda, telling their stories, celebrating their lives, highlighting the work of active seniors in the community, providing the elder population with useful information on aging, and more. There's one segment of seniors in my experience these past 13-plus years and change here at the Anaconda Leader who have been active above and beyond the call of duty, and that's our veterans – and one group in particular, American Legion Post No. 21, has served the community in so many ways.

There is the Honor Guard of course, providing military honors to deceased veterans and their



See LEGION on page 3 The American Legion Honor Guard battles the wind to keep the colors hoisted during the July 4 parade. Leader photo.



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families, as well as hoisting the colors at parades, A's baseball games and public ceremonies. There are the breakfasts, like on Palm Sunday and Good Neighbor Day, organizing Memorial Day activities and sponsoring American Legion Boys State and American Legion Auxiliary Girls State. And of course there's the ever-popular bingo night.

These are things that have continued year in and year out, but then there were many other things that they had done that I recall. There were all the dinners for veterans, the Salute the Youth dinners, the guest speakers and educational programs for youth on Veterans Day, and on Flag Day the flag ceremonies at Head Start and the honorable disposal of flags whose times have passed. But it has seemed to this patriotic non-veteran that these times have passed – and I'm not the only one who has observed this.

"We're too old," Lee Burt, the new post commander of the American Legion, said bluntly as he opened his first meeting on July 10.

Burt, who served in the Army from 1968 to 1971 – "it's the best thing I've ever done," he said of his service – is best known for his tremendous efforts in putting together dozens of Uniform Display Ceremonies at the Anaconda-Deer Lodge County Courthouse, a project he undertook with Anaconda's now-former chapter of the Disabled American Veterans (it has since merged with Butte due to lack of numbers). Those ceremonies, too, sadly had to go by the wayside as his own health made it impossible for him

to continue them.

But he agreed to put in one final tour of duty as American Legion commander in an effort to stem the tide of these losses and rally the community to reverse this trend. But that can only be accomplished with one thing: Members, especially active members and most especially in the form of younger veterans.

"Young brings young. I've seen what a failure of membership has done," Burt said. "[So] my whole goal is about membership and community service."

Burt expressed his gratitude toward longtime Legion members such as Pat Tracy, Phil Watt and Bill Wind for their help keeping the Legion going, and particularly to John Stevenson for agreeing to serve as the post's adjutant for one more year. Likewise for Rosie Garcia, one of those elusive few younger veterans – she served in the Army from 2009 to 2017 – who has gotten involved and in her case agreed to serve as first vice-commander.

"Rosie is the youngest American Legion veteran we have," Burt said. "Without the young, we're not going to get more young. I respect Rosie 100 percent."

Garcia credited Ot Lemm, a veteran of the Korean War, for getting her involved with the Legion, particularly the Honor Guard.

"I want to be part of helping the community. It's a great resource for veterans. Someone there always knows something for veterans. It's a great group of people. Being the only female when I first joined, they were like, 'you need to be in the Auxiliary,' but no, I'm right where I



Above: The American Legion Honor Guard hoists the colors at Senior Night for the A's. Photo courtesy of Carly Moodry. Right: The Legion serves up the Good Neighbor Day Breakfast. Leader photo.

want to be," Garcia said. "Being in the Legion is interesting. All the stories about what they got to do and we didn't get to do. It was nice to hear the different cultures of the military."

Growing the membership is important to her, as without new members the post will fall "and I don't want to see that."

"We hit a rough patch but I'm not giving up. I want to bring it back to where people say 'the Legion' and they'll know what you're talking about. I want to bring it back and revitalize it," she said. "I'd like to see it back to what it was, but we need younger members. Our current members, they just can't do it anymore."

"Younger" is a bit of a relative term of course, particularly when the majority of active members are from the Vietnam era or even earlier, as



with Lemm or with the patriarch of Anaconda's community of veterans, John Pellegrini, who served during World War II and continues to be active as bugler for the Honor Guard. The Honor Guard was key for one younger veteran who's new to the Anaconda post, Scott Saffold of Deer Lodge, who served in the Navy from 1984-1988.

"My neighbor, Rick Cole, we were talking one day and he mentioned he had joined and had went to one of the services and they barely had enough guys to have a proper service. I got to thinking,

'that's terrible.' The more he talked about it, the more I thought 'I'm retired now, so I have some time so it's something I should check out.' I've performed four services so far and I've only been in for a month. There's so much I get out of it. It's a great honor," Saffold said. "They needed help. A lot of the members are physically unable to do it. I've noticed that the people of Anaconda are very patriotic, so that's neat. It's always been my soft white underbelly, when it comes to veterans

Retired colonel, combat helicopter pilot speaks on battling survivor's guilt to serve his fellow veterans

JAMES S. ROSIEN
EDITOR

The life and deeds of retired Col. William Charles "Bill" Willing could take up this entire publication – his resume alone would fill the space allotted for this article, after all he is the highest-decorated Montana Guardsman for both the Army and Air.

Recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal, the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, the list goes on and on.

Likewise, his assignments ranged from unit commander all the way up to Assistant Army Chief of Staff and Executive Officer of State Area Command for both the Army and Air National Guard.

The much longer list, though, is the one that's summed up in a single number: 512.

That's the number of combat missions the infantryman-turned-pilot, the young man who flunked out of college (he later went back and got his bachelor's and master's degrees), "the old man" of his crew at age 23, flew as a

helicopter gunship pilot in Vietnam.

It's a staggering number, particularly considering that more than half of his unit didn't make it back home. And they've stayed with him. The soldiers and their wives and children – children in some cases they never got to meet.

"While I was on active status, I never really had intentions of staying plugged in with all these soldiers," Willing said. "[But] they were impacted by their service. I reflected on that and realized they can't just be dropped. It's almost like survivor's guilt. The survivor's guilt settles in and you think, 'if he hadn't died, he'd have done this.' It does become a family. You're closer to them than your wife or partner. You depend upon them for your life. They have your 'six' and you have theirs."

While Willing, a Glendive native, is married to the love of his life, Nonnie Siegle of Anaconda and is himself a proud resident of the Smelter City, he said he was fortunate that he was single during the war.

"For those who were married, who had



Bill Willing, the highest-decorated Montana Guardsman for both the Army and Air, is pictured in his retirement photo, having worked his way up from infantryman to Colonel – and flying 512 combat missions along the way. Courtesy photo.

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just found out they were going to be a father, and then to be killed the next day?" he said as much as asked. "The family needs to be taken care of."

That's where his work on behalf of veterans and their families began – work that took him all the way up to serving as Chairman of the Board of Veterans Affairs representing the 110,000 Montana veterans, their spouses and dependent children.

It started out with just their basic needs, something as simple as housework – or as silent and solemn as a gravestone.

"We'd organize teams of non-mobilized soldiers. We put in hot water heaters, screens, even something as simple as a light bulb. You'd come into the house in uniform and the kids would run up screaming 'Daddy, daddy!' and then realize that you aren't their daddy," Willing said. "That's why I got involved."

Willing is the first to admit that he isn't in the best of health: He's 100% disabled, having been affected by spraying Agent Orange – "by the time you got back, your flight suit would be soaked with it," he said – yet he continues serving veterans well past retirement. That's his main area of focus now, in fact, as he serves as a trustee of the Southwest Montana Veterans Home – and has been calling attention to the

fact that it is for veterans of all of Southwest Montana and not only Butte.

"It's crucial for people to understand this is not the Butte Veterans Home," said Willing, who along with fellow Anaconda trustee Errol Eileraas and the rest of the veterans home's trustees are organizing a public meeting on Monday, Aug. 5 at 7 p.m. at the Elks Lodge in Anaconda, 221 Main St., so as to get the word out about it (see sidebar at right).

"We're making this available so they know this is their veterans home," he said.

Willing expanded upon some of the debilitating conditions that can affect veterans, as well as some of their underlying causes that catch up to them as they get older. He started by sharing an anecdote about smoking Marlboro Reds while refueling his helicopter – which seems like a pretty bad idea "but you were going to die anyway," he said. That was the reality, so that was the mentality that was necessary.

"It defines who you are," Willing said. "At the same time, you become monsters. When you lose the guy you've been sharing popcorn with, having a beer with, you get angry. It's a loss of innocence when you go to war, so you protect

VETERANS concludes on page 6

Southwest Montana Veterans Home meeting at the Anaconda Elks Lodge, Monday, Aug 5 at 7 p.m.

Trustees of the Southwest Montana Veterans Home will hold a public meeting Monday, Aug. 5, 2024 at 7 p.m. at the Elks Lodge in Anaconda. All are welcome to attend this informational meeting about the veterans home, which is for veterans of all Southwest Montana. There are currently five skilled nursing cottages with 12 bedrooms and enclosed walkways currently under construction to connect the cottages. Each cottage is designed to be very "homelike" with private bedrooms and bathrooms, a central kitchen, dining and living rooms, and a spa/bath room. The heart of the "home" is the Community Center with a large multi-purpose room, barber/beauty shop, therapy gym that offers physical, occupational and speech therapies as well as outpatient care for those in need within the community, reception area, medical exam room, and administrative offices. For more information, call (406) 792-3100 or go to <https://www.dphhs.mt.gov/healthcarefacilities/swmvh/>. The Southwest Montana Veterans Home is located at 65 Veterans Circle in Butte.

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VETERANS from Page 5

the boy that you were by holding onto something that was yours.”

He told a story about how his dad had sent him a pair of cowboy boots to remind him of home, boots packed with Canadian beer and popcorn – which was gobbled up by his crewmen in two minutes.

The popcorn speaks to the innocence, while the beer speaks to the loss.

“Everyone got drunk so they wouldn’t remember what they did that day, or that they were going to die the next day. It was self-medication,” he said. “So many veterans struggle with alcoholism. And as they age, it gets harder and harder to contain those memories. You start becoming human again, so you start drinking again. That’s what pushed me to get involved with veterans.”

Willing himself didn’t talk about his experiences in war until he got involved working with veterans.

“It’s really hard as you get older,” he said. “It’s taken me a long time to get there.”

And that’s coming from someone who continued his service in the Montana Army National Guard – and was hired on by another Anacondan, the late Gordon Tracy, who would later arrange for Willing to land his Montana Guard Aviation helicopter at Kennedy Common years ago.

“He was my commanding officer, and he was a great man,” Willing said of Tracy. “[And] this town of Anaconda, I’m so amazed.”

“I thought that when I moved to Anaconda, I’d just be Bill Willing married to an Anaconda girl and no one would know me,” he said.

Well it didn’t quite turn out that way – and that’s okay, because in his own words, “taking care of veterans is for the greater good.”

And for that greater good, Willing is encouraging everyone to attend that Southwest Montana Veterans Home trustees’ meeting, set for Aug. 5 at 7 p.m. at the Elks Lodge in Anaconda.

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Community Nursing Home of Anaconda	563-8417
Court House Information	563-4000
Metcalf Memorial Senior Citizens Center	563-3504
MSU Extension Agent	563-4035
Hearst Free Library	563-6932
Anaconda Veterans’ Clinic	563-6090
Veterans’ representative	406-533-0910
Do Not Call registry	1-888-382-1222
Commodity supplemental food program	563-3504
Adult Protective Services in Anaconda	563-3448
Agency on Aging hotline	1-800-332-2272
Montana Legal Aid, Butte office	723-4612
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LEGION from Page 3

and honor and patriotism. It can get me misty eyed pretty quick. I'm sure that'll never go away, and I hope it doesn't. I'm pretty passionate about it."

That echoes Lemm's thoughts at that meeting as to why he joined.

"I felt my veteran brothers and sisters needed and deserved an Honor Guard ceremony," he said. "The rest came along."

"Since I've been retired – a lot of people suffer from a loss of purpose once they retire,

and I've been feeling that for quite some time, so it sort of recharged my battery. It's a chance to do something. I feel really appreciated. Another neighbor of mine across the alley, he joined as well, so that's three of us that can come down there. With the price of gas, that's a good thing."

Mark Callison, like Safford another "younger" veteran having served during Operation Desert Storm, sees the American Legion as a way to help his hometown.

"Anaconda has been my hometown forever and the Legion afforded me the opportunity to help. The Legion was always doing stuff for the community," Callison said. "We are a band of brothers. A lot of them [the older members] worked with my dad on the smelter, and a lot of them have passed on since then. We need to be involved in the community because of how thin the organizations have gotten. If we don't get new people, it's gone."

"We're a community-based organization first," Burt said in agreement. "We want to be able to do more. But we need the younger veterans, and their families."

"For me the bottom line is it's a way of knowing about America. So many young people have lost that," Callison said.

Burt stressed that in the Legion is inclusive of all veterans.

"We don't say 'Mr.' or 'Mrs.' We say 'Veteran.' We don't see color, we don't see race, we see veteran," he said. "We'd love for you to come to our meetings and see what we

have to offer – just to associate with other veterans. Just hanging around the periphery you just get drawn in. That's what it was for me. Even if we can get these younger veterans showing up on the periphery, see what we're all about. The main motivation though is how hard-working these officers are, and that it's not about me, it's about the community. It gets me involved with other human beings, it fights off some of the isolation and the loneliness. There's lots of good people in this community, and by joining an organization you eventually feel like you're a big part of it."

"Come to a few meetings and see what we do. Ask us questions. Most people think we're just old men coming here to drink. That's not why we're here," he said. "Give us a chance, that's what we're asking."

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Paula Arneson, left, and Ruth Moen have been interviewing Anaconda's elder residents for an oral history project as part of Smeltermen's Day. Leader photo.

Preserving Anaconda's Past through its oral history

Back in the April 2024 edition of Smelter City Seniors, we included an article about an effort to record the Smelter City's oral history for the annual Smeltermen's Day Celebration that's rapidly approaching on Aug. 9-11. Well that project has certainly continued apace, but while this year's set of

recordings have been completed the project's organizers are looking for anyone interested for the next year.

"We started with the last few smeltermen that we knew were still with us," explained Paula Arneson, who conducted the interviews along

See HISTORY on page 11

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HISTORY from Page 9

with Ruth Moen and with equipment provided by Blake Hempstead.

While interviews with smeltermen were important, they were not the only ones to give their oral histories.

"We wanted to talk to all kinds of people regardless of whether they worked on the smelter or not. We reached out to quite a few people and got stories from all walks of life," Arneson said.

In total they completed 11 interviews for this year's Smeltermen's Day Celebration: Mladim Babich – "he was a hoot because we got to hear his whole life story," Arneson said – as well as Duane Lanes, Dick Verstraete, Bob Daniel, Cal Stanley, Sonny Langer, Jim Davison, Cait Francisco, John Forkan and Al and Dolores Messer.

The interviews touched on what work they did, what memories they have of Smeltermen's Day, as well where they were when they heard the smelter was closing, what the effects of that closure were on their families.

"Dick's was really interesting. He was in the banking business and

people wanted to make good on their loans. The phone was just ringing off the hook. He said they pretty much let them do whatever they needed to do. The main overarching bank was secure enough that they pretty much let Anaconda deal with their customers the way they needed to. He said almost everyone wanted to make good on their obligations," Arneson said. "It was really interesting with the Messers [who owned Coast to Coast Hardware]. Dolores said, 'We didn't miss a beat. We were never worried. We knew that when we moved here we were just going to have to keep it going. We'd have to do it ourselves.'"

The interviews will be shown on laptops at the Montana Hotel on Saturday, Aug. 10 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Arneson said that while they're taking a break from conducting any more interviews until the fall, they welcome anyone interested in being interviewed, or knows someone who should be interviewed, to contact Paula at (406) 560-6792 or Ruth at (406) 799-3754.

Metcalfe Center Schedule

Veterans' services: Veteran's Service Officer is at the center the first Wednesday of every month from 9 a.m. to noon.

Nail clippings: Monthly – call Kate at the Metcalfe Senior Center at 563-3504 for more information.

Senior shopping: Every Thursday afternoon. You must call the Metcalfe Senior Center at 563-3504 by noon to be picked up.

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Lunch is served Monday through Friday at noon at the Metcalfe Center. Menus are available monthly from the center; menus are subject to change. For more information, call 563-3504.

Meals on Wheels services also are available, as is the van transportation service. Call 563-3504 if you're interested in receiving Meals on Wheels or to arrange transportation to and from the center for lunch.

The Metcalfe Memorial Senior Citizens Center is located at 115 E. Pennsylvania Ave.

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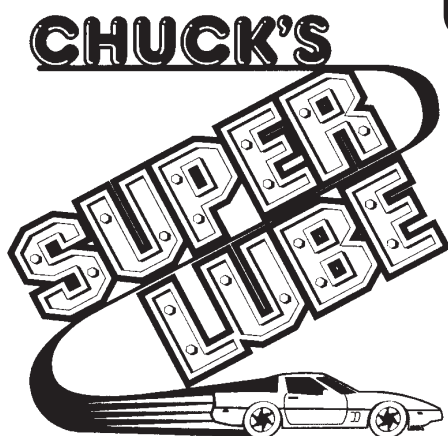
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Montana State University Extension releases a new magazine on Alzheimer's disease, related dementias

Montana State University Extension has created a new magazine on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias that is designed especially for Montana farmers and ranchers.

Montana has more than 21,000 people living with Alzheimer's disease, according to the Alzheimer's Association, including agricultural producers, said Marsha Goetting, MSU Extension family economics specialist.

"Family caregivers (of agricultural producers) have approached me asking about financial and health care powers of attorney when I present estate and legacy planning meetings across the state," Goetting said.

MSU Extension developed "Alzheimer's and Related

Dementias: Support for Montana Farmers and Ranchers" magazine to provide more information about Alzheimer's disease and its impact on farmers and ranchers, Goetting said. The magazine is designed for Montana agricultural producers facing the early to middle stages of Alzheimer's diseases, their families and family caregivers.

"Unfortunately, there is still a stigma attached to Alzheimer's and other related forms of dementia," said Goetting. "It's not a person's fault when their brain shrinks and they can't remember or perform chores like they used to. Alzheimer's is a disease, not a normal part of aging."

Magazine article topics include

See EXTENSION on page 13



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Fax (406) 563-4001
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Marsha Goetting, left, MSU Extension family economics specialist, and Kayleen Kidwell, Anaconda-Deer Lodge County Extension agent, hold up their favorite publications to help kids understand Alzheimer's and dementia. Leader photo.



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How the Metcalf levies support our seniors

NIKKI JOHNSON
REPORTER

When I walked into the Metcalf Memorial Senior Citizens Center to interview Center Director Kate Coward for this article, two baby fawns, still covered in their white spots, nonchalantly strolled around the corner of the building, resting underneath a tree, basking in its shade.

"Mom's around here somewhere," Coward said. "We usually get a couple here every year."

It's a somber thought considering that if the mill levy didn't pass last month, these seemingly insignificant experiences could have been gone for good.

"The levy is a vital, vital vein of this senior citizen center," Coward explained.

"People say, so what does the mill levy do for operational services for the center? It's spent through activities. It does a tremendous amount of assistance for us," she said, explaining that it covers costs for activities, food, and most other operational expenditures necessary for the center to function.

"Unfortunately, this isn't anything new that people don't know, but we've lost a lot of people. And we're now feeling the pinch in a huge way. With inflation and lack of people coming, it's not that they don't like the place, I always get



While Anaconda-Deer Lodge County Head Start kids may not be the typical age demographic for the Metcalf Memorial Senior Citizens Center, they were and are more than welcome to hang out with the seniors. Leader photo.

good reviews, I'm talking about the people who have passed on. They're a huge impact on the center. This center belongs to the seniors. It's their home, or second home, they come and play cards or they do bingo. Some people just come in to be someplace other than home, and that's really important," she said.

Over the years, the center has become a staple for the community by providing a safe and comfortable place for seniors to socialize, partake in a plethora of fun activities, and meet or reconnect with friends. Sadly, participation has been on a slow decline for a while now.

"That's a huge problem with elderly people. They become

shut-ins. I don't care if it's during the winter months or summer, it's all year round. That's why I enforce that fact with people. I say, come down, have a cup of coffee, have a cup of tea. We even have a nice TV that they can watch.

See METCALF on page 14

EXTENSION

from Page 12

potential causes, signs and early diagnosis; definitions of normal parts of aging; the progression of Alzheimer's disease; caregiver wellness; communicating about a diagnosis; and options for treatment. The magazine also highlights Alzheimer's disease research and treatments, and it includes some stories of Montana farm and ranch families who have a family member who has Alzheimer's disease.

Goetting, who provides estate planning programs statewide, webinars and online town halls for AARP-Montana, said that farmers and ranchers in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease can complete legal documents to ensure that their families know their financial, health and legacy planning wishes.

To get a printed copy of the magazine, contact the local MSU Extension office or order online at montana.edu/extension/alzheimers/magorderform.html. A digital copy of the magazine is also online.



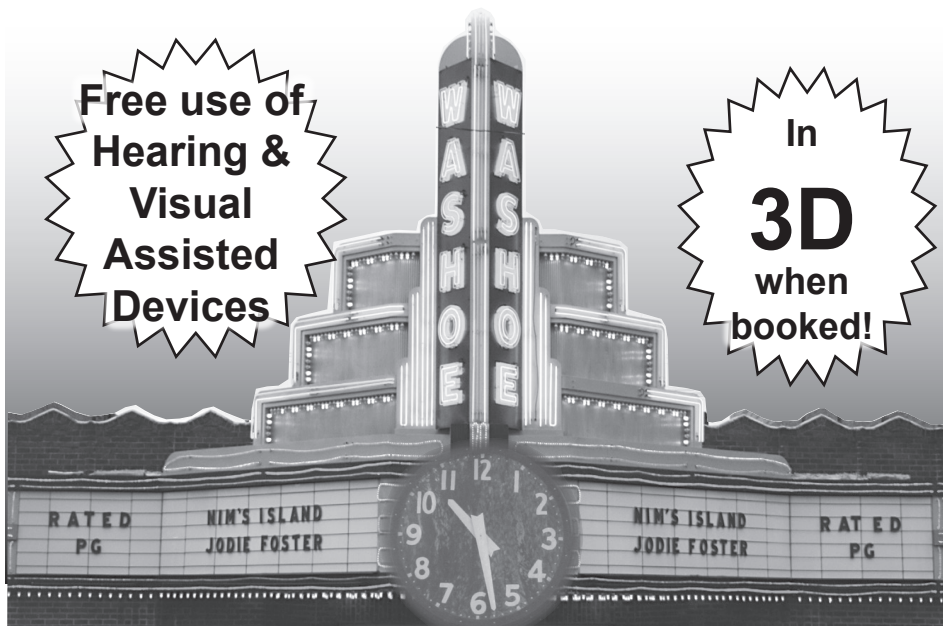

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Nobody's going to bother them. There's puzzles they can do, or cards, and nobody is too old to come here," urged Coward. "It's a real inspiration for the community to see what they're doing and what can be done here."

Regardless of attendance, one thing is monumentally important to the future of the facility and that's money. However, thanks to the support of the community, the levy has been approved and Coward needs that support to continue – possibly now more than ever.

"If you, for instance, have an appointment at say the hospital here and you come here an hour early to pass the time, that's also an option. There are a lot of functions that can be utilized, and the most important is keeping this open, yes, but the people themselves are crucial. And the mill levy speaks to us that they care. When that gets passed, that is so much appreciated that I don't think people realize what an impact each and every individual is doing by passing that mill levy," she explained. "I'm proud

of this center because I look around at the other centers in the state and they don't have the ambiance or the friendliness, and that's so irreplaceable. And you see that with the regulars that come in. It's their home. And we want people to enjoy it."

Regardless of the positive impact the center has on the community, Coward has seen a noticeable decline in participation. This summer, for the first time, they stopped providing lunch services on Fridays due to a lack of participation and conflicting seasonal activities, but they will resume serving in the fall.

"I just can't tell you how much we need that mill levy," she expressed with noticeable concern. "I cannot express enough, thanks to the people in this community for that mill levy, because that is so vitally important. Like I said, it's a main vein, it's huge."

"They're all human beings," she said when asked about the importance of supporting the elderly community as strongly as

those who reside at the other end of the age spectrum. "They all have needs, may they be old or young. They'll go through life having needs. So, they started out as kids, they end up as older adults. It's the circle of life as people say."

But the need for connection and a variety of activities is universal, and equally important regardless of age, and without the support of the levy the facility would most assuredly not be operational.

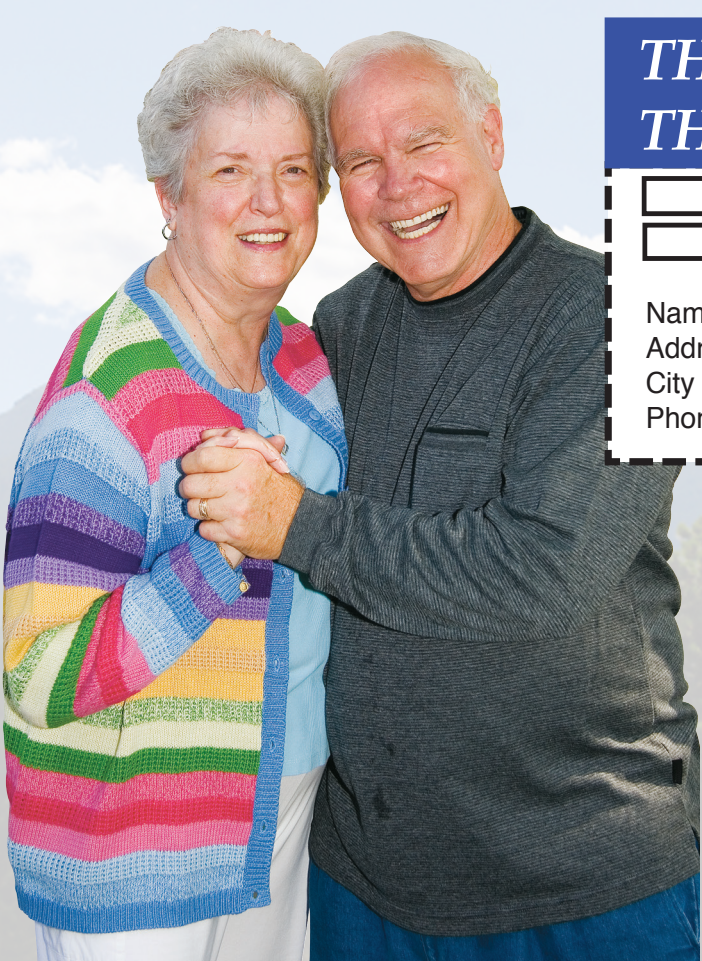
"You're investing in your community when you pass the mill levy. That's all I can really say. How powerful it is, it's a huge investment. But if they think about it, if they pass that mill levy, each and every one of those people put an investment in. Everyone can make a difference," Coward explained. "I've had people that have been shut-ins, their families called up and said would it be alright? Absolutely," she said, "it's their center. And they have turned around and gotten social and their life and activities have changed. They've just blossomed.

They flourish. So what does that tell you? You're just never too old, you know? And if someone has a problem we've got the bus. That levy supports that bus."

In addition to the bus, the center provides a food commodities program, affordable in-center lunches, pinochle, cards, board games, a venue for groups to meet, three pool tables, a large television and sitting area, and most importantly a comfortable place for seniors to socialize. In September they're even planning a big center barbecue with a live band.

"We're going to do something fun for them. Everyone needs to socialize to keep that mind sharp to some degree. And that's what's important about the center. And without the mill levy, I don't know if we'd be going forward," she said. "It's minimal, and because it's minimal, I don't have a problem asking for it. I'm not asking for thousands of dollars from everybody, but you know, this is a community that belongs to all the people."

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'It's just fun': Senior shares his passion for woodcarving

NIKKI JOHNSON
REPORTER

Many great artists claim that you don't find art – art finds you – and for woodworking craftsman Bob Smith, that was most certainly the case. Serendipitously, one day back in 2005, Bob ran across a piece designed by Mike Crum.

"He was carving, and I saw his first carving and I really loved what he had and then I started carving," he said, describing the artwork as "sort of a castle made out of wood. It's all mystique type."

The typical wood that Bob works with is cottonwood bark, which he crafts into mystical houses. He looks at the bark and envisions doors, windows, stairs, chimneys, and all the minute details that breathe life into his creations.

"It's like they say, if you don't like it just throw it in the fire. So it's worthwhile one way or the other," he chuckled, recalling how many have gone in the fire over the years stating that it was "a few."

While his passion is undeniably making his mystical, magical houses, he's hardly a one-trick pony; he also constructs candle holders, cribbage boards, even incense stick holders. Many of his creations will be available at Art in Washoe Park along with those of his fellow Copper Village Woodcarvers.

Bob has done Art in the Park for about nine years and what he doesn't sell there either goes on the

wall or he gifts to family members.

But every good artist needs a muse, and Bob found his in his wife Peggy. They met the day she graduated high school but the ties of fate bound them together several years later when they ran into each other while he was bartending at Carmel's. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Throughout his career Bob worked in education. In Anaconda, he was briefly called in to cover a teacher's pregnancy, then the young family moved to Lewistown, where he spent 23 years in education. He was a superintendent in both Lima and a high school in Deer Lodge. Next, they moved to Hamilton where he had two positions, one at a middle school and another at a kindergarten. Then, finally, they moved back to the Smelter City and he officially retired in 2005, the same year he ran across Mike Crum and his mystical castle made out of wood. It was then that he joined the woodcarving class at the Copper Village Museum and Art Center.

"We have a carving club and there's one guy from Butte that's taught carving for probably 40 years that comes over and he keeps trying to talk me into doing faces and just other carvings and I don't see it," he explained. "And I wasn't comfortable in carving them so I went into my regular."

Over the years the class has seen members from teenagers up to, well, older adults; men and women

See FUN on page 16



Bob Smith directs traffic to the Copper Village Woodcarvers booth at Art in Washoe Park – which is back this weekend (July 19-21). Leader file photo.



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alike. One woman was involved for about two years and went on to become a professional working woodcarving artist.

But for Bob, it's really all about the process.

"It's just fun. You can just quietly sit and do it," he said, then reflected on his favorite piece he ever made.

"It was like two large pieces stuck together. I describe it like a castle. So I put doors in the bottom, and there's a tower and windows and all of it, then over in this piece," he described while motioning to two invisible pieces of bark in his hands, "there's another piece in the bottom except it has a drawbridge on it. So, this side was where the people lived in, the castle part of it, then this piece is where they keep the animals. And I even put a little prison on the top of it. You know, that was where the prisoners were kept. The bad people," he chuckled.

The woodworking class meets on Wednesdays from 5-9 p.m., running September through April or May. Cost is \$1 a class and anyone is welcome to participate. There are decades of experience between the members and they are eager and willing to teach new people. They even have tools to lend out.

"One guy's carved for 30 years. Another guy for 30-35 years. So if anyone would want to learn, we'll lend tools. If you have the dexterity to do it, it's there," he said. "When I got started, I could see in this piece that Mike had just what I wanted. And then I got my first piece of wood and carved something very similar. It was fun."

But it's not entirely all fun and games for Bob, better known as Sprocket to his friends, evidenced by two slightly larger houses that he built along the way.

"So, after I remodeled the house we bought at the lake, I built two more houses on my property," he explained.

The houses were constructed as a place for his children to stay when they visited from out of state.

"So I started building the houses. Well my son from Missoula has a lot of friends and Fourth of July weekend is his weekend, so he invites bunches up to my compound. So Peggy and I took the motorhome down to the campground for four days," he laughed describing the approximately 30 people that showed up.

It's a good thing that Bob can build houses, because if his kids keep bringing their friends home, then it may be time for his next project. To date, he has crafted around 280 pieces, and he's not done yet.



Bob Smith's favorite woodcarving is his two-tower castle, complete with drawbridge, which is so intricate that it has plenty of tales of its own to tell. Photo courtesy of Bob Smith.

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