

KIAWANDA COMMUNITY CENTER

1997-2007

The Mission of the Kiawanda Community Center

To promote community participation through inter-generational activities, programs and projects that meet the needs of the citizens of
South Tillamook County

The miracle of community-mindedness is that when ideas merge around a common need, the final result can far surpass its origins. On June 2, 1997 the Kiawanda Senior Community Center opened its doors to the public.

The years of preparation leading up to this day faded into memory as the challenge of finishing the interior and maintaining and operating the center became a reality. But no history would be complete without recalling the plans and dreams that came to fruition that day.

In 1980 Sid Fisher Hall, owned and maintained by the Pacific City-Woods Chamber of Commerce, became a daily senior meal site. By the early 1990s the extreme age of the building necessitated extensive repair. A committee which included Nancy Bush and Judy Landingham called for the county commissioners' help in upgrading or replacing the meal site. Meanwhile, developers Faye Jensen, Ben Johnson, Mary Jones and Jeff Schons were discussing the need for a building large enough for community gatherings. When, for safety reasons, the Chamber closed Sid Fisher Hall in 1993, Shirley and Alan Kerr stepped in to offer the Central Building as a temporary senior meal site.

On February 2, 1994, the "Community Center Committee" met to elect officers and determine their purpose. Members were: Jeff Schons, President; Mary Jones, Secretary; Rose Wharton, Treasurer; and George Baumgardner, Paul Frank, Ben Johnson Sr., Doug Kellow, Judy Landingham, Sophie Nelson, Bill Sears, Dick Stone and Maxine Wright. The committee invited input from the county commissioners' office, Public Health Department and the Clatsop Tillamook Intergovernmental Council, (the body which provided senior meals). They planned to apply for a HUD grant. In June, Schons and Jones donated three lots in Nestucca Ridge for a possible building site and "Kiawanda Lodge Committee" became the group's new name for a short time until the Articles of Incorporation were drawn up and filed under the designation, Kiawanda Community Center. The term "Senior" was later inserted to meet grant requirements.

A year after the first Community Center meeting on January 6, 1995, Faye Jensen wrote a letter of intent to donate 1.3 acres of land valued at \$125,000 for the building site. A board of directors was elected with Dick Stone, Accountant, and Margo Underwood, Pacific City-Woods Chamber president, acting as consultants. Mary Jones collaborated with Vicki Goodman from the Economic Development Office to write a grant. The first lot at Nestucca Ridge sold for \$34,000 and architect Ralph Olsen was hired to draw plans for the proposed 6500 square foot building. On May 1, 1995, the Kiawanda Senior Community Center Board received an Economic Development grant for \$552,000 to move forward with the building.

There followed a long period of planning and permits. Coalman Construction Company was awarded the building contract with the contractor's expectation that they "... should be finished by

Christmas”. The groundbreaking ceremony occurred on May 17, 1996 at the edge of the property outside cyclone fencing erected by the contractor. Most of the KSCC Board and committee members were present with shovels in hand along with Gina Firman representing the Commissioners and Sue Cameron of the Health Department.

In August an Operations and Management Committee was formed as an arm of the KSCC Board to formulate plans for building usage and volunteer activities. Members were: Jeff Schons, Chair; Diana Sears, Co-Chair; and Judy Burns, John Gomena, Helen Porter, Janet Trueblood, Public Health Dept; and Gwynn Ferber, CTIC.

Intensive fund raising to meet the gap of \$120,000 between building costs and the grant began immediately. The South Tillamook County Library Club offered help in fund raising. From May to October volunteer efforts raised \$3500. Darlene Barrett chaired a huge rummage sale at the end of August held at the recently closed Hungry Harbor Restaurant which netted \$2863. A quilt raffle in November raised \$356. Donations of \$2000 supplemented the fund raisers. Volunteers were already meeting one day a week spurred on by Willie Wenner’s suggestion to recycle greeting cards. These cards and handcrafts were sold from a table at the Christmas Bazaar held at the Central Building. As the time approached to open the center, Erma Lafreniere agreed to be Volunteer Coordinator.

The Chamber sold the Sid Fisher Hall splitting the proceeds between the new South County Library and Kiawanda Senior Community Center which added another \$20,000 to the Center’s coffers. The income from the sale of the three lots at Nestucca Ridge was designated to pay architectural fees and salary for the contractor liaison. Doug Kellow was appointed Project Manager.

Christmas came and went and 1997 began with the hope that the Center would be completed within weeks. An estimated \$50,000 was needed for furnishings and finishing the interior. Loans of \$38,500 were made by private parties, with most of the interest refunded enabling the Board to move forward. Ray Barrett offered to include building security checks free of charge on his regular route in the area. A gas log insert, donated by Tierra Del Mar Association was installed in the Lounge in March.

In a large measure KSCC’s mounting problem with available cash was resolved by the donation of labor by Big Rock Construction and waiver of hookup fees by the Pacific City Water and Sewer District who also agreed that installation of a sprinkler system would be postponed and when installed, a charge of \$100 per head when used, and not to exceed \$1000 per use, would be assessed by the district.

Believing that the Center would soon be operating, the Board hired Jo Anna Rogers to act as KSCC administrator twenty-five hours a week. She expressed to the Headlight Herald what we all wished for the new Center: that it would be a “. . . true enhancement of senior life in the area” and that “ownership (of the Center) would be through participation.” With an administrator in place the Operations Committee was dissolved.

The Nestucca High School Care Club had planned a Senior Citizen Prom in March to celebrate the opening, but had to hold it at the high school instead. By April, KSCC had received old furnishings from the Hebo School and donations of carpet, an office computer, new furniture for the Lounge and ceiling paint.

It was discovered that the wrong grade of shingle siding had been put on and opening of the center was further postponed. However, a pre-booked wedding was held in the Great Hall on May 1st without carpet or a completed kitchen. In the middle of the month the volunteers paid an orientation visit to the still unfinished building. The “Great Weekend Garage Sale” was held on Memorial weekend at the Center while re-shingling was occurring out of doors. The Memorial Weekend Sale has continued every year since, doubling and tripling the first year’s receipts.

It was with a tremendous sense of relief on June 2nd that the doors finally opened to serve the first senior meal in the new building using the old meal site tables and chairs. Ethel Matson was meal site manager and Jeri Lytsell was the cook. The carpet still needed to be installed, mop boards and interior doors needed staining and the walls needed painting, but the Center was open. The dream was a reality. For the next month and a half, volunteers devoted many hours to readying the building for its opening celebration, Christmas in July.

And Christmas it was! The public was invited to the opening with flag raising and ribbon cutting, Santa Claus in attendance (courtesy of Gene Schlag), a Christmas tree with gift boxes under it containing a brand new Gateway computer and a turkey dinner with all the trimmings served out of the “state of the art” kitchen.

Without the cushion of a tax base to draw on, creating income for the Center will always be the focal point for the Kiawanda Board and the Volunteers and it was particularly crucial in the early days of operation. Tillamook Bay Community College leased the small office in June ‘97 and continually renewed that lease through 2006. The County Health Department moved into the other two rental spaces and it appeared that income from these rents would at least provide a steady, if not entirely adequate, income to the center.

Imagine the shock and dismay when a final accounting of the grant money by the Clatsop Tillamook Intergovernmental Council revealed an over-run on costs and the demand for over \$40,000 to pay off the contractor and allow the County Commissioners to release title to the Kiawanda Board of Directors. Meanwhile, a punch list of unacceptable construction items was growing longer and pressure was on to remedy these items before the contractor’s guarantee lapsed. To complicate financial progress, the County withheld payment of rents for the Health Department on the premise that as long as the building remained in the county’s possession it was not reasonable to pay rent for use of its own facilities.

Everyone dug in and worked hard. Partnerships with other organizations became key to survival. With South Tillamook County Library Club’s help, a huge musical variety show was held in August. The calendar for the next two years was crammed with fund raisers. A cast of over one hundred volunteers spent more than a thousand hours a month to put on Mothers’ and Fathers’ Day Breakfasts, Spaghetti Feeds and a Christmas Bazaar as well as keep the Center open seven days a week. The Pacific City Fire Department turned over the Big Bingo event to KSCC. The Library and Center shared proceeds from the Fourth of July Fish Fry which has since evolved into a Strawberry and Ice Cream Festival with the scarcity of bottom fish. The Nesko Club donated a small PA system which improved the quality of communication during meetings held in the Great Hall.

The Nestucca High School students had already forged a bond when the Care Club and NHS Jazz Band hosted the Senior Citizen Prom. A partnership was cemented with the joint purchase of a portable dance floor by the Nestucca High School Student Body and an anonymous donor. It was agreed that the floor would be stored at the Center and that the students might hold dances there free

of charge. The Senior Citizen Prom continues as an annual event enjoyed by old and young alike. Students in the Nestucca Connections class helped with weeding and planting in the landscape areas edging the parking lot and they help with the major moving of rummage in and out of storage for the Memorial Day Sale. In 2006 the Board of Directors invited a representative from the Nestucca Valley Development Council to act as an Associate Board Member thereby facilitating communications between the Center and the high school.

Volunteers created projects and activities designed to bring the public to the Center. At the outset, a Family Night was held with games and free popcorn once a week. Exercise equipment set up in the stage area kept a few people supplied. A crafts and needlework group met informally and contributed to the Christmas Bazaar. The receipt of a \$10,000 grant from the Collins Foundation boosted morale considerably and the purchase of eighteen round tables and 144 chairs greatly enhanced the appearance of the Great Hall.

But the Board was struggling still with cash flow and reluctantly abolished the position of administrator in September of '98, turning over the entire operation of the Center to volunteers. And a capable squad of volunteers they are, having served on through changes and enlisting others to join in making KCC the Place To Be.

Public relations expanded with the publication of the KSCC Times in January 1998, edited by Iris Leonard and Nan Kellow under Connie Chandler's tutelage on the computer. A contest was held to name the free newspaper before year's end and the newly named Kiawanda Kapers grew in circulation and popularity, moving through a series of co-editorships by Peg Nowlan, Teddy Schultz and Marsha Zehrung to Candace Churchley and Jackie Shank. The stated purpose of the Kapers is "... to facilitate involvement in KSCC by providing information and entertainment for its readers". Through the sale of calling card-sized ads, the paper has become self-supporting while advancing the stature of the Center in the community.

In March 1999, after agreeing to pay rent for one office and use the second free of charge, the County Commissioners turned the building title over to the Kiawanda Board of Directors. In July the Board leased the kitchen to Northwest Coast Senior Services five days a week for the preparation of senior meals to be delivered and served throughout Clatsop and Tillamook Counties by the Bateman Corporation. This not only increased rental income, but the Center became the employer of the meal site manager. This position also includes work as a clerk in the office a few hours a week.

In 2000, the Center became a regular stop for the Wave which provides bus service to Tillamook and Portland. The Tillamook Transportation District canvassed for volunteers to operate Dial-A-Ride in South County. While the Center has no responsibility for the program other than providing parking for the van, the local service raised the visibility of the center to the entire community.

At the end of five years, the Board deleted the word "Senior" from the Center's title, as permitted by the terms of the building grant. It was not to indicate a reduction in service to senior citizens, but rather to encourage younger people to become involved and signaled an effort to offer activities of interest to all ages. It is, however, seniors who have continued steadily to serve in the operation and maintenance of Kiawanda Community Center and who seek ways to bring the community together inside its doors.

Mary Smith, who served as Volunteer Coordinator at the time, spearheaded the gift of a 50s Sock Hop for Nestucca students. Learning the dances and costume for the period was included as part of

the Wellness class at the high school that term. The dance was so well received that the enthusiasm prompted teen dances every two years since, as schedules allowed.

One activity group, the Tuesday Stitchers, created another community connection by devoting one day a month to creating quilts for children who would be staying at the Caring Cabin in Woods, a retreat for cancer-affected children and their families. It was only natural that the group then presented lap quilts of comfort and cheer to community members and friends undergoing cancer treatment or other extreme illnesses. The community connection extended again as the Stitchers made pillowcases for Nestucca High's Senior Safe Night and yet again with the creation of bags to hold individual knitting projects by a local 4-H group.

Successful fund raising enabled the Board to set aside funds, not only for maintenance and repair of appliances and machinery, but allowed the establishment of a Building Fund. From the beginning, there was never enough room for storage or simultaneous activities for large groups. The first requirement was more parking and property adjacent to the south east boundary was purchased. A grant from the Tillamook PUD helped to pay for grading and lighting the new parking area.

A Strategic Planning Workshop led by Carolyn McVickers in 2005 re-energized the Board and identified needs and new direction which led most visibly to changes in the office area. As always, volunteers bore the brunt of translating these changes into a working model and they did so successfully. Records show that over one hundred volunteers contribute nearly 12,000 hours every year to support the operations, fund raisers, and activities of KCC. What the figures don't reveal is that those hours represent a vast array of skills and imagination along with cooperation and dedication.

As KCC celebrates ten years of operation, the future looks both challenging and promising. The receipt of a Cultural Arts Grant from US Bank led to the creation of a relief carving representing the spirit of the Nestucca Indians by artist Greg Albright and is displayed outdoors at the northeast corner of the building. A revolving local history display will be on exhibit in the Lounge.

Roof replacement is an immediate need and the Board is seeking grants for matching funds to meet that need. In addition, preliminary plans have been drawn for an addition to include a separate meeting room and storage space on the south side of the building. The Building Fund stands presently at \$102,000 and rises with each fund raiser and donation for that purpose. The goal for that fund is \$300,000.

Here again, it is hoped grants will help reach that goal and the next five years will find another dream, shared by so many in the community, has become a reality.