

Moving On Up On the West Side

New White Salmon center serves county offices and seniors

By Jeanie Senior

Mary Ann Voigt figures at least 10 years of fundraising and campaigning is represented in the new senior center in White Salmon.

"We just kept prodding," says Mary Ann, who is in her seventh year as president of the senior meals site.

The seniors' campaign ultimately got results: a senior center that occupies some 10,000 square feet of White Salmon's new Pioneer Center, which opened in October at the east end of Washington Street.

The rest of the 25,000-square-foot building is occupied by Klickitat County, including offices for the sheriff's department, the health department, West District Court, and the probation and juvenile department.

"Isn't it beautiful?" asks Klickitat County Commissioner Don Struck. "There's nothing extravagant, but it's well designed.

"I think the character of the building turned out to be really indicative of what we wanted: a building that really captured the feel of western Klickitat County."

The sprawling Pioneer Center looks like a national park lodge. Inside, that impression is heightened by the extensive use of wood, most of it re-sawn out of the

massive beams from the long-closed St. Regis sawmill in Klickitat, which the county owns.

Some of the old mill's beams were so large they were cut in half for use in the Pioneer Center. Old growth Douglas fir is used for structural supports, and for benches and an open staircase in the lobby.

The senior center portion of the \$5 million building was financed by a \$500,000 federal block grant and by \$500,000 in landfill funds. The rest of the money for the Pioneer Center's construction came from a \$2.5 million bond issue and cash from the county.

Mary Ann Voigt and Roger Gadway, the county's director of senior services, were those who met with architect Sid Scott of Portland-based Scott Edwards Associates for about a year, to ensure the senior center met expectations.

"I think that's why it turned out as well as it has," Roger says. "The architect was a good listener."

The building is a far cry from the previous senior meals site in rented facilities at the Park Center in

White Salmon.

"And that was it," says Roger. "That's all the old place did offer: meals."

Roger says most people at the Park Center would eat and leave.

"Here, we've had the experience that they stay around a little bit longer," he adds.

Now, meals are prepared in a beautifully-equipped kitchen and served on Mondays and Wednesdays in an airy, spacious dining room. Wednesday's lunch is followed by entertainment, usually musicians.

"The acoustics are good, and that helps," Roger says. "Fortunately, we told the architect that one of the top priorities was good acoustics, and he managed to pull it off."

Roger says there are no plans to expand the schedule and serve meals more days a week, but they would like to see that happen.

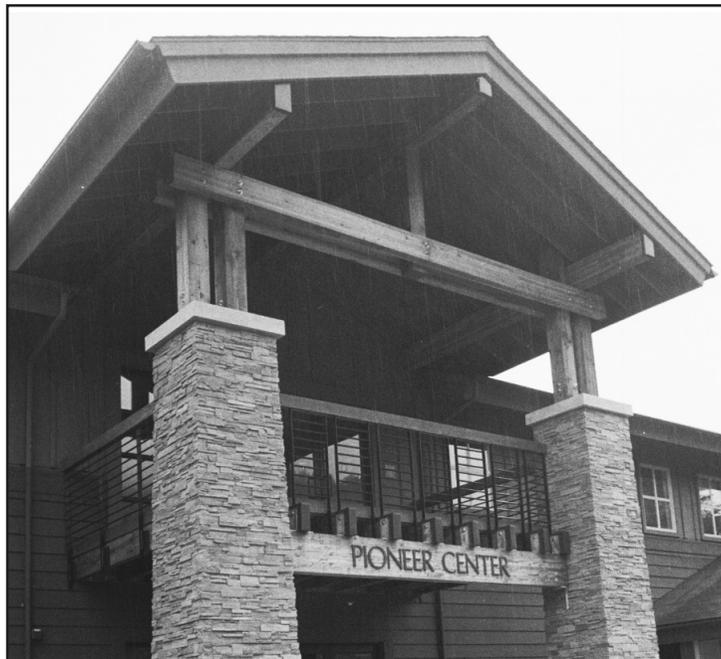
The biggest lunch crowd now comes on Wednesdays, when the Klickitat senior services bus picks people up in Trout Lake and Glenwood, brings them to town for shopping and to the senior center for lunch.

Although most of the diners are local, there are guests from around the county, some from Hood River and occasionally vacationers.

"I don't know how they find us," Roger quips.

Volunteers collect the \$3 donation asked for the meal, and help prepare and serve the meals. The volunteers tend to be seniors, but not always, Roger says.

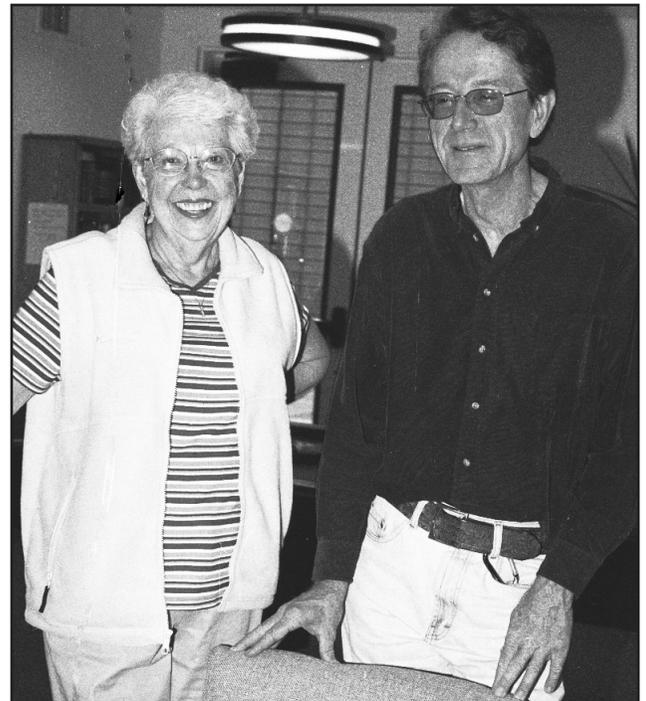
Besides the kitchen, dining room and offices for senior services staff,



The grand entrance to the Pioneer Center in White Salmon.



Clockwise, from left, Delores Brock, Dola Ellis, Benora Rude and Dorothy Sampson enjoy a card game in the new senior center. Mary Ann Voigt is in her seventh year as president of the senior meals site. Roger Gadway is Klickitat County's director of senior services. The reception area has a national park lodge appearance.



the senior center portion of the building includes a comfortable crafts room equipped with a large screen television with DVD and videotape player. Donations of tapes and DVDs are welcome. There are jigsaw puzzles, games, books and a pool table.

An area is set aside for yet-to-be-installed computers.

From 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., people are welcome to come in, relax and take advantage of the facilities.

Several card players come in at noon on Thursdays for a few hours of pinochle in one of the meeting rooms. A musical jam session on the fourth Sunday of each month attracts sizable numbers.

Several other county offices in the Pioneer Center migrated from the Park Center. The building offers several meeting rooms.

"They are very well utilized," Don says, "and now we can hold public hearings in White Salmon so people don't have to drive to Goldendale for issues that involve the west end."

Different sections of the new building are named after early settlers—an idea intended to heighten the west county's identity with the building, Don says.

Having the Pioneer Center incorporate county offices in addition to the senior center answered the growing demand for more county services in the west end.

"People don't have to take a whole day to drive to Goldendale and back to get a building permit," Don says, citing one example.

The reception desk at the main entrance is staffed by a county services representative: Jody Fluery works Mondays through Wednesdays, and Summer Zoller is there Thursdays and Fridays.

They can issue building permits and direct people to the county departments that can help them.

Historically, geographic distances have been a problem for the county.

The Pioneer Center "has gone a long way in helping to repair that," Don says. "It really ties east and west together." ■