

A Nonprofit's Best Friend

Umbrella organization can help groups attain funds for community projects

By Jeanie Senior

One of the biggest challenges nonprofit groups face is acquiring funds to make their projects a reality. But those groups in Klickitat County have a patron.

"We want to get the word out that we are here, and we want to help communities," Linda Williams says of Community Enrichment for Klickitat County, shortened to CEKC and pronounced "seek."

CEKC is a tax-exempt 501(c)3 nonprofit. Bruce Bolme, a White Salmon member of the group's board of directors, describes CEKC as an umbrella organization that can aid local nonprofit groups.

Its mission is to increase prosperity and enhance the quality of life for the people in Klickitat County, and to provide support for community projects.

Representatives of Goldendale, Bingen-White Salmon, Lyle, Wishram, Klickitat and the Big River Native peoples' group are on the CEKC Board of Directors.

CEKC's existence means that each group seeking

a grant does not have to attain its own federal tax-exempt status.

"It's expensive to get organized, to do the bylaws and incorporate," Bruce says.

Any nonprofit operating in Klickitat County can turn to CEKC for assistance.

The organization processed \$85,000 in grant applications in its first year, according to its treasurer, Brian Wanless of Goldendale.

Some recent grants helped fund:

- Purchase of a set of movable bleachers for the Snowden community.
- Lyle's Cultural Exchange Program, through a grant from the Tulalip tribal casino.
- Remodeling of the old Lyle Elementary School, now a community center.

For Linda, CEKC's registered agent, it is a logical successor to the Horizons program in Klickitat County, a former Northwest area foundation initiative to boost rural communities.

When Horizons appeared about five years ago, Linda was thinking of retiring from her job at Klickitat County's Washington State University Extension office. Instead, she stayed on to be coach of Horizons, which created several community circles aimed at revitalizing communities she had gotten to know well after a decade of running the Extension 4-H program.

Horizons circles in Goldendale, White Salmon-Bingen, Glenwood, Klickitat, Trout Lake, Lyle, Wishram and with the Big River community fostered programs ranging from the Kids Backpack Program, which sends weekend food home with needy kids, to Lyle's Cultural Exchange.

The Klickitat-Skamania Horizons Telecommunications committee, meanwhile, scored inclusion in a statewide federal stimulus grant totaling \$84.3 million, including \$3.7 million to invest in a fiber-optic infrastructure in the two counties and expand the availability of broadband Internet service.

The Horizons project "couldn't have come at a better time," Linda says. "With the economic downturn, it's given some communities hope.



From left, Linda Williams, Rhonda Spies and Jackie Rosier check out a handbag designed by Rhonda during a quilting session at the Glenwood Grange.

It's been really rewarding to see the things that the communities are doing. Sometimes they get discouraged because they don't see the progress that they've made, but if you take a look at where they were before they got started, they have accomplished so much."

The Big River Native peoples' group, for example, has held wellness classes, worked on housing and held culture camps, the most recent at the Rock Creek Longhouse.

The camps are family events that have offered language classes, drumming and instruction in how to put up a sweat lodge, Linda says.

Several community gardens have been established, including one in Wishram that expanded to food preservation classes and a local fruit and vegetable stand. The Wishram community garden produced 1.5 tons of fresh produce in 2009.

In Trout Lake, the Grange Hall has continued to expand its role as a community center. The hall used Horizon funds for some renovation projects.

"Granges are so important to these small communities," says Linda, who hopes a quilting and fiber arts group will continue regular meetings at the Glenwood Grange.

Six women showed up for a recent meeting, most of them quilters. Linda brought her spinning wheel. They shared pizza for lunch and learned a new quilting technique from Jackie Rosier.

With Horizons in the past, Linda's new title is community coach, but her focus has not changed.

"I love the job because what it does is give you an opportunity to be a cheerleader for the communities--bring workshops, resources," she says. "It's just been a delight to be able to do that. I am so proud of the volunteers that have been working so hard in these communities. They have made a difference."

With so much to do, Linda is not thinking about retiring.

"Here's my thought on retiring: What would I do, sit around?" she wonders. "I have learned over the years that the people who have longevity never retire. They're always active in their community. It's always important to give back. Sometimes you might change directions a little bit, but retirement, for me, is not a total option for now." ■

To learn more about CEKC, view a calendar of community events or find a grant application form, go to the website <http://communityenrichmentforklickitatcounty.org/CEFKC/CEKC.html>. Contact Linda Williams at (509) 773-6067 or CEKEmail@gmail.com.



Linda looks over a poster board she made to showcase the opportunities offered by Community Enrichment for Klickitat County. Linda is the organization's community coach.