

Seniors will advocate for themselves in Sisters

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

Seniors who live in Sisters Country can make their voices heard through the Senior Alliance, newly formed advocacy and action group focused on making Sisters an Age-Friendly Community (AFC). The Alliance grew out of efforts by Sisters resident Joann Powers, who was recently faced with challenges familiar to seniors when unexpected health issues arise.

At a meeting held January 18, planning got underway for an evening of Community Conversation scheduled for Wednesday, March 21, at the Sisters-Camp Sherman Rural Fire District Community Hall. Work groups were formed to conduct research and collect information on the three key elements of an AFC — built environment, service environment, and social environment.

The information collected by the work groups will be shared at the Community Conversation so that participants will have factual information in order to make informed decisions when prioritizing the senior issues and

needs identified at the AFC town hall held last November.

A community dinner will be served from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m., followed by group discussions about planning for an AFC. Sisters residents Rennie Morrell, Kay Payne, Michelle Smith, Donna Tewksbury and Pam Walsh are planning the March 21 event.

At the November meeting, several groups identified what is already working for seniors in Sisters, what are current barriers to improvement, and what are suggestions for improvement and to bring change, focusing on the three key elements of an AFC. The breakout sessions in March will discuss possible short-, mid-, and long-term goals and action planning for each of the key elements.

The built environment group will look at issues regarding housing, transportation, and outdoor spaces and buildings. Community and health services and communication/information comprise the topics considered under the service environment. The social environment subcategories include employment and the economy, civic participation and

volunteering, social participation, and respect and social inclusion.

Four main areas emerged across the board as needing to be addressed: isolation, transportation, housing, and healthcare. All four are intertwined and impact one another. To create an AFC, it is helpful to take a holistic approach, addressing a number of interrelated issues that impact all citizens, not only seniors.

Several steps have already been taken toward creating a more age-friendly community. Two local Sisters residents, Toni Landis and Dixie Eckford, have been appointed to the Central Oregon Council on Aging

(COCOA) advisory council, the first representatives ever from Sisters.

COCOA has offered to have a resource representative in Sisters every Monday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. beginning March 5, to work with seniors needing assistance, information, and access to a variety of services. COCOA is approaching Sisters Park & Recreation District (SPRD) for possible use of their SAGE room, which hosts senior activities every afternoon from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. In all the other Central Oregon cities, COCOA has personnel on a regular basis in the senior centers. Sisters has no official senior center, so SPRD has

offered their space for senior activities.

The Senior Alliance is already working in partnership with COCOA, SPRD, Citizens4Community, and the Fire Department's Fire Corps. They hope to increase their partnerships by working with the City of Sisters, Deschutes County, local service clubs and veteran's groups, as well as local businesses.

The next meeting of the Senior Alliance is scheduled for Thursday, February 8, 8:30 to 10 a.m. at SPRD. People of all ages interested in working to establish an age-friendly Sisters are invited to attend. For more information contact Toni Landis 541-480-4803.

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