



Longtime members refresh their memories of the the PSAC's earliest days by looking through the Center's wealth of scrapbooks. Clockwise from left, Mary Cook, Larry Cook and Lucile Robinson-Lee.



The PSAC's bi-monthly hearty pancake breakfasts are open to the whole community and serve as a primary fundraiser for the Center's many needs. Standard menu offerings include pancakes or biscuits and gravy, served with eggs, sausage and a beverage for only \$6. Typically, the kitchen also runs a special, like this beautiful eggs Benedict, for only one or two dollars more.

Upcoming regular events at the PSAC

Public is welcome; \$1 donation requested

Mondays: 10 a.m. Tai Chi
Tuesdays: 10 a.m. Bridge class (RSVP); 11:30 a.m. Bridge; 12:30 p.m. Cribbage
Wednesdays: 10:30 a.m. Yoga; 12:30 p.m. Pinochle
Thursdays: 10 a.m. Tai Chi; 12:30 p.m. Pinochle; 1 p.m. Mahjong
Fridays: 9 a.m. Quilts from the Heart, Sewing Group, and/or Yarn Crafts (call ahead or check the calendar for details)

LIFE AFTER 50

The self-sustaining nonprofit Peninsula Senior Activity Center is a welcoming community to all

Story and photos by LYNETTE RAE McADAMS

There's a place toward the north end of Washington's Long Beach Peninsula where the heat's always on, the lights are kept bright, and you can count on a fresh pot of coffee every time you walk in. It's a library and a cafe, a school as well as a dance hall, a revolving boutique, and at least twice a week, an unexpected (but magnificent) kind of gymnasium.

Looking for a great deal on one of the best breakfasts on the beach? Fancy yourself as something of a card shark? Perhaps you've been thinking it might be nice to brush up on your foxtrot or take a chance on a tango. Whatever your interests, whatever your skills, consider a visit to the PSAC — the place where each and every day they're redefining what it means to have a "senior moment."

Located in the heart of Klipsan Beach, just a few miles south of Ocean Park, Washington, the Peninsula Senior Activity Center more than lives up to its name, continuing to evolve along a steady path toward its primary mission: To enhance the quality of life, maintain the independence, and add to the well-being of our senior citizens.

It exists as a gathering place for service groups and community events; a learning hall for classes on everything from origami to gardening to Thai cooking; a certified warming center, open in emergencies; a spot to enjoy an occasional home-cooked meal with friends and neighbors; and an overall resource center for anyone entering their second half of life.

But let's back up a bit.

Because of course, the Center's story starts long before there was ever an actual Center; like so many of life's most wonderful things, it all began as just a dream.

Looking back

"It was pretty simple," recalls charter member Lucile Robinson-Lee, 87, looking over a set of typewritten meeting minutes from the original PSAC planning committee, dated 1980. "There was a small group of us from the local AARP who saw there was a real need, so we got together and set out to fulfill it."

In those days, service clubs and community organizations, fueled largely by the local population of retirees, hopped around from public



The Peninsula Senior Activity Center is located at 21603 O Lane in Ocean Park, Washington (at Klipsan Beach).

building to public building — meeting one month at the fire station, the next at a school, then perhaps a local church: "What we really needed was a place that we could call our own."

Hoping to obtain support from an already existing entity, those early members increased their numbers and their dollars, polished their idea for a dedicated facility, then shopped around for sponsorship: "We took it to the county, we took it to the city, we took it everywhere, but no one would touch it," says Robinson-Lee, the beginnings of a smile playing at her lips. "So that's when we decided we'd just build it ourselves."

Powered by sheer will and grassroots determination (and fortified with hundreds of pot-lucks), years of fundraising then commenced — 15 to be precise — with rummage sales and special dinners, cake walks and car washes, all adding slowly, but surely, to a pot that continued to grow.

"We just stuck with it," says Robinson-Lee, with perfect matter-of-factness. "And then some time in the mid-'90s, the most wonderful thing began happening — the donations started

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coming, and you can't imagine how happy we were!"

With generous gifts from individuals such as Art Newton and Walter and Theon Cline, along with grants from the Templin and Ben Cheney Foundations, it looked as though a long-held dream might finally become reality. And when the Loren H. Corder Foundation donated the land where the Center still resides, the deal was sealed.

"We were overwhelmed with gratitude," says Robinson-Lee, beaming. "We still are."

Construction crews, comprised largely of volunteers, broke ground in September 1998, and in May 2000, the Peninsula Senior Activity Center opened its doors for the first time.

Here and now

Almost 16 years later, standing in the entry at the Center, natural light flooding through every window (and there are many), Ernie Henson looks around at the freshly painted walls and trim, the shining floors and well-kept carpet, the full-to-bursting library, then flashes an easy smile before saying, "You have to understand, the folks that built this place came from the greatest generation, and we called them that for a reason. You had to be tough to wait 20 years to create something like this, but they could do anything, and that spirit still lives here."

As president of the Center's board of directors, Henson is quick with words that reflect justifiable pride for the Center: "There's still a

Join the PSAC today (Or at least drop in for breakfast...)

The PSAC is open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday, as well as evenings and weekends for scheduled events. A self-sustaining, nonprofit organization, the Center operates on a slim budget and is reliant on funds raised through membership dues and community events, like bi-monthly pancake breakfasts and special dinners. Membership is not required for participation in PSAC events — the entire public is invited to attend. Active memberships (age 50 and older) and associate memberships (non-voting, age 21-49) are \$15 per year, and all proceeds help keep the lights on and the doors open. For more information, or to donate or volunteer, call 360-665-3999 or visit www.peninsulaseniorcenter.com

Getting there: Traveling north from Long Beach on Highway 103, turn right on 217th Lane, then right again in the driveway just past the Family Health Center.



Multiple card groups meet weekly at the Peninsula Senior Activity Center. Here, members are gathered for a game of partnership pinochle.

Save the date for these special upcoming PSAC events:

Jan. 13 & 27: 5:30 p.m. Dance Club
Jan. 18: 2 p.m. Ice Cream Social
Jan. 21: 5 p.m. Monthly Dinner (chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes, gravy, green beans, roll and dessert for \$8; RSVP)
Jan. 30: Pancake Breakfast, \$6

every penny we receive here, you've no idea," Henson continues. "But what really makes a place run is heart, and we've got that in spades. Just look at this place, there's nothing else like it — it's clean, it's beautiful, it's an all-around joy. More than anything else, it's like one really big, really fun club."

But don't worry, there's no secret handshake required.

"We accept everyone, and we try really hard to make people feel welcome," says board member John Vale, chair of the activities committee and leader of the Center's magnificent kitchen crew. "If you walk through that door, somebody is going to let you know you belong here."

"It's a marvelous thing to reach a place where you don't have anything to lose anymore," he adds. "We don't have to show off our money, or our cars, or our looks. You can come here and exercise, or dance, or play cards, or even start your own thing — whatever you want — and someone's always going to greet you warmly and offer you friendship and space."

"All you have to do is take the chance," Vale says. "Come to the Senior Center, and reinvent yourself."



Ernie Henson, PSAC president, left, stands with board member John Vale in the lending library at the Peninsula Senior Activity Center in Ocean Park, Washington.



Janet Henson and Diane West, members and volunteers at the Peninsula Senior Activity Center in Ocean Park, Washington, sit together at the entrance table to the annual New Year's Eve dinner, a popular event that had more than 100 people in attendance.