

HISTORY OF OUR CENTER – In Installments

“The Beginnings”

Dreams, we all have dreams. Dreams for a better life. Dreams to make our community a better place to live. Dreams for our families to thrive. Dreams are where our story begins. A small group of couples in small town Meridian had a dream. A dream of having a community center for seniors that would provide a place to gather. A center where they could meet together to socialize, have meals, play games, be entertained and educated, receive services, organize activities, serve their community in turn and thrive.

The dream began in the early 60's when a group of seniors started meeting at the old Occident Club once a month for potluck dinners and cards. These couples included Homer & Susie Holiday, Art & Lulu Johnson, Fred & Faye Peters, Joe & Alice Iverson, Earl & Ima Brinegar, Jess & Hazel Hedges. Others participated but no record of their names exists. Soon it became apparent that Meridian Seniors needed a place of their own. It is important to note here that of the 2616 (1970 census) population in Meridian, 604 were seniors. So, on December 8, 1969, the group meet for a potluck dinner to which Rev. Fothergill attended to promote the idea of organizing a Senior Citizens Organization. Two women from Boise also attended to share about the group they had in Boise. They told of their activities and the help provided to older citizens in their city. A discussion followed.

Another meeting was set to meet again at the Occident Club on January 12, 1970, with a potluck meal at noon. An invitation was extended to all interested seniors who might drop in for coffee and cookies following luncheon to attend the meeting. At this meeting, Mrs. E.B. Jenkins (Oma) was elected president, Mr. Fred Peters, vice-president and Mrs. John Fritchie was elected secretary/treasurer. The name, “The Friendship Club”, was selected but later was changed to the “Senior Citizens Club”. Expenses were met by individual donations and the Methodist Church Ladies who gave \$29.25 from proceeds of their Mother's Day Tea in May, 1970.

For the first three years, the Senior Citizens Club paid the Occident Club \$10.00 monthly rent. In May, 1973, the rent was reduced to \$5.00 per month until 1975 when the Occident Club selected the seniors' club as that year's community project and did away with any rent.

Those early years the officers of the club changed as some moved, passed away or became too ill to serve. The 1st change was Mr. Peters moving to Kansas so Mr. Barber was elected vice president until he passed away. Then Bernice Jones and Edith Crockett acted as vice president in the absence of the president. Mrs Valerie Louderbough was elected president after Mrs. Jenkins had served 7 years. Mrs. Ethel Duerock was appointed secretary/treasurer when Mrs. Fritchie became too ill. Dorothy Brace was later voted into the position.

The club members were very active producing their own programs which consisted of interesting readings, jokes and riddles. At different meetings, Blanch Chapman showed slides of her Hawaiian trip, Ethel Pickington shared her European trip and Clara Hamming talked about her trip to Switzerland. The school children had donated blackout curtains so the slides could be shown as well as having "picture shows". Other programs were provided by the Kuna Seniors, the "Happy Harpers", a presentation of the RSVP and communication from the Area Agency on Aging. When the programs weren't too long, the seniors enjoyed playing games and cards. The favorites were Bridge, Pinochle, Yahtze, Kings in the Corner and Checkers. At Christmas time, each would bring a gift for a man which were boxed up to deliver to the Boise Rescue Mission. In 1976, they were able to add \$7.00 cash to donate to the Mission.

In the mid-70's, the club participated in a Senior Citizens Festival of Heritage Arts, a Senior Citizens Fair at the Ada County Courthouse, and a Fair at the Westgate Mall (Nov 19, 1976). In March 1977, Mrs. Ambrose from Central District Health reported on the funds available that she was trying to use to make Meals on Wheels available to Meridian seniors. Then in October 1977, Rudolph Wilson told the seniors that they would have a bus available on the 1st from Health and Welfare to be used for life resources and trips. Even the delivery would be paid.

With the election of Mrs. Louderbough in 1977, big changes were in the offing. "Tune in" next publication to learn of the great move forward toward fulfilling the dream of a group of Meridian seniors.

Part 2

Moving Forward...

...toward fulfilling the dream. We left off in 1977 when Mrs. Louderbough was elected president of the Senior Citizens Club to begin serving in 1978. She set to work immediately and on February 7, 1978, the "Meridian Area Senior Citizens Association" received its Certificate of Incorporation signed by Pete T. Cenarrusa, Secretary of State. The Articles of Incorporation (on file in our Executive Director's office) witness that Oma Jenkins, Dorothy Brace, Minnie Anderson, Ray Langley, John Fritchie, Annie Jones and Sherman Louderbough were the first directors of the corporation.

The group was now meeting the 1st and 3rd Tuesday each month at noon at the Wheel Inn Mobile Manor recreation hall, 700 E Fairview. In a Valley News article, a "Fun Time" was announced by Mrs. Louderbough. On the 1st Tuesday each month at 1:30, seniors were invited to bring games to play for "fellowship". With 604+ seniors in the area," she was quoted," and many seniors moving here, we need a larger place as we need to gather to help each other and avoid the negative effects of isolation. We are seeking donations."

In June, movement occurred when the City of Meridian applied, as a sponsor, for a grant to construct the recreation and multi-purpose facility for the Meridian Senior Citizens. And while the City was seeking federal funds to build, the group itself was looking for land on which to construct the facility, estimated to cost \$150k-250k. They wanted to acquire a ½ acre for the proposed building of 100'x100' with parking for 50 cars. Mrs. L made a public call for "moral and financial support to reach this goal." In her promotion, she pointed out that the facility would be available to local groups, provide local employment and operate 5 days a week to carry out the group's planned nutrition program. The building would have a kitchen with a dining room to seat 200. in addition, there would be rooms for recreation, pool, quilting and sales, with offices, storage and restrooms. What is more, the Woodsmen of the World had already given them a piano.

(It's an interesting note here to mention that in Feb 1978, the Meridian City Council placed a moratorium on further land annexations and rezones until planning processes could catch up with growth. (Hah!) At the time, Meridian Greens was the only development to have received plat approval for its phase one. Speaking of growth, in 8 years, Meridian's population had increased from 2616 residents to over 5200! City Councilman, Grant Kingsford, "I'm not opposed to growth as long as it is planned. Streets, parks, fire stations, utilities, schools, so on, must be carefully considered." The 79-page preliminary version of the Comprehensive Plan was presented to the Council June 21, 1978.)

Mrs. Louderbough and the seniors group were busy throughout '78 raising funds and trying to acquire land, but that wasn't the extent of their actions. They were working diligently to provide services to the seniors as well as benefit the community at large. They extended the transportation services with the van on loan through Health and Welfare; started, essentially, an employment service matching small-job workers with seniors needing help around their homes; then, in early 1979, they conducted a citywide survey to identify senior citizens' needs. Now remember, no internet or email, so they had to call and visit churches, mobile home parks, apartment complexes and so on. Initially, they identified and interviewed 580 individuals 60 years of age and older. A daunting task but very helpful for developing their future programs and for the City's planning. Some of their findings included a need for a retirement center, a need for a pick-up to use to deliver wood donated by Boise Cascade to homes of the elderly, people to do odd-jobs around seniors' homes, transportation to shopping areas and doctors' offices and of course, a place for seniors to gather,

In 1979, the senior citizens group's activities grew. They sponsored a Saturday night community dance held at the Meridian Junior High with proceeds going to the Building Fund. The Calvary Baptist Mission Pastor and Mrs. Willis Blair with Maxine Ryals and her mother, presented a puppet show in March. Then in July, a Senior Citizens Festival was held on the Ada County Courthouse lawn. Craft booths, food and entertainment went on for 3 days. Gail Green with the Jeritols played his sweet trumpet on Thursday of the festival which was an annual event. A picnic in Storey Park was held July 15th; entertainment included a large group of Old Time Fiddlers. Councilmen, the Director of Human Resources, Ada County Commissioners, representatives from CDC, Office on Aging, R.S.V.P., Lions Club, BSU and many political candidates attended – must have been the place to be! It was announced here that the Meridian Seniors Nutrition Program would begin July 24th at OJ's Restaurant each Thursday at 1:30. Potlucks, meetings, and "Fun Time" would continue on 1st and 3rd Tuesdays at the Wheel Inn.

Finally in August, Mrs. L announced that they had made arrangements for the needed land. This ambitious lady said they would be drawing up the plans not only for the seniors' center but also for a retirement facility/home. (I have not found any further reference to this land or plans for a retirement home.) But anyway, fundraising really picked up with an antiques auction, several raffles, more community dances, a talent show, a Christmas bazaar in October and the sale of Medi-Dots (personal medical information encoded onto cards that are read by a "viewer" at hospitals and on Quick Response Units). Even Chapel of the Chimes (funeral home) set out memorial contribution envelopes in support of the senior citizens' building project.

Dollars were being collected toward the dream of having a Senior Center but little movement through much of 1980 until October 6, 1980. The newspaper headline read, "SENIOR CITIZENS CENTER OR SEWERS?" At the City Council meeting, one councilman, Rick Orton, argued that \$7.5 million had already been "pumped" into the water/sewer system in the past 2 years and it was time to turn things around and use the \$200k federal grant for a new 10,000 sq. ft. senior citizens center. Thirty-five seniors gave him a

standing ovation then they listened quietly as the decision was pronounced. Though sewers won out (3-1 vote), much came of the meeting to move the seniors closer to their goal. The Council voted (4-0) to form a senior citizens advisory committee to explore and prepare plans to be used in application for future grants. The committee would also recommend possible land sites. Some mentioned the old sewage treatment plant on Eighth Street and the land near the Speedway, So, what came next? Come back for our next edition...Toni

History of Our Center

Part 3

Ups and Downs

Exciting news! February 3rd, 1981, the dream of having a senior center came a step closer to reality when the Meridian City Council approved a land lease for a 3-acre parcel in Storey Park. For one dollar a year for 30 years, the land was provided to erect the new center. Mayor Joe Glaysier signed the lease with seniors, Valerie Louderbough, Anne Jones, Nonabell Pereboom, and Elizabeth Ryan looking on. At that time, about 850 seniors were living in the immediate area representing an increase of nearly 300 in just 2 years.

And the bad news? Estimated costs for construction of the proposed facility were \$400,000 (in 1980's dollars). The building fund had amassed only \$2256.60. So now with the hope that receiving the leased land would bring about private donations and cause a snowball effect to help fund the center, the senior group dug in to raise the money needed to build their center. Immediately, a memorial fund was established at the First Security Bank to which 39 donations in memory of family members and friends were made the first two months of the fund's opening.

February 21st, the Cherry Plaza Merchants hosted a Cherry Pie Tasting Contest. First prize was a \$100 diamond pendant won by Opal Riddle. The 58 pies entered went to the Seniors to sell by the slice with a cup of coffee. This netted \$135 for the building fund. (You'll find the recipe for the award-winning pie, *Cherry Cheese Pie*, is in this newsletter.) Hobbie Crafts, Inc., (a group of retirees who wanted to keep busy and give back to their community) began making wood projects from their woodshop set up in the old Creamery building. Their first project was to

rebuild a large rocking chair that had been shipped without all the parts; they sold raffle tickets with proceeds for the center building project. They continued making wood projects to sell with all proceeds going toward the building fund. The Meridian Raceway held their opening Easter Benefit Race with all proceeds going to the Seniors building fund - \$3819.84! Nell Buskey, an active senior in the group, even got to be the "Trophy Girl". In June, the Meridian Chamber of Commerce held an auction donating all \$2300 raised. October 24th, the seniors held their annual Christmas Bazaar at Cherry Plaza Shopping Mall. By year's end, the seniors had collected almost \$12,000 in cash and another \$60,000 promised in donated labor and discounts for building materials by Boise Homes of Meridian.

All seemed to be progressing well. September 25th, a model of the proposed plan using modular or "systems building" concept had been presented. December 9th, the Valley Times reported that the Meridian City Council had accepted the Senior Citizens Advisory Group's recommendation (after 2 public hearings and months of receiving overwhelming support) to apply for the Community Development Block Grant through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). (Remember that the previous year the grant opportunity went to the sewer rehabilitation project.)

Now, the Council's action would permit Project Consultant, Wayne Forrey of JUB Engineering, to outline specifics of the grant application and submit it to HUD by March 1, 1982, deadline. Forrey indicated that the cost estimates requested in the grant would be about \$200,000. That the total costs would depend on the donated labor and materials. So far, in addition to Boise Homes donating labor and the donated engineering work by JUB, materials were promised by Pumice Block and landscaping by various individuals.

Support for the application came from Dee Slack, assistant director of Older Americans Planning for the Area Agency on Aging. She was quoted, "Most of the communities of the 10 counties we serve have a senior center, Meridian does not. I believe we can prove the efforts have been made to reaching their goal. We have cooperated with the community and local government."

"Meridian has been neglected because they haven't been at a point where they can move ahead with their center," Roy Watson, representative from the Ada

County Council on Aging said. "Now is the time!" Forrey said construction could begin as early as next summer if everything goes as planned." And there's the rub.

In May 1982, the City received news from the Idaho Division of Economic and Community Affairs that had just taken over administration of the HUD grants from the Federal department of Housing and Urban Development. In taking over, they made a ruling that stipulated that 80% of previous HUD monies had to be spent prior to applying for another grant. The previous year no such ruling had existed. City officials, therefore, at the time the monies were awarded last year for the sewer project, were not obligated to meet a deadline in spending any amount of the \$121,000 received. Even if they had been obligated to spend it, they had been unable to proceed with the project due to the highwater tables preempting the start of the project. Though a community outcry for a reconsideration was made to the Division of Economic and Community Affairs, no waiver was forthcoming. Meridian City Councilman Bill Brewer said, "This is a crummy deal all the way around. It's a big letdown!" Two years of tireless labor by active community leaders, businesses and hundreds of citizens had been stricken down due to an arbitrary new rule set down by an Idaho State department without warning or consideration by providing at least a year's notice.

As the June 1st deadline passed for qualifying for the grant, the City was unable to complete the sewer project in time or even use 80% of the previous grant, so the Seniors' application was not considered at all by the State. But a new opportunity came to light. The seniors would have another (3rd) grab at the federal brass ring in October when they could apply for the 1983 funds available early the next year. The new MASCA (Meridian Area Senior Citizens Association) President, Elizabeth Ryan, admitted it was a big disappointment to start again, "but we're not done yet. We're going to go right ahead and apply this fall. After all these setbacks, we'll appreciate it a lot more by the time we finally get it." Bill Brewer added that this will be a time for the community to rally with greater energy and extra fundraising to have the matching funds required as part of the HUD grant application. And that's what happened. Through various projects, more than \$20,000 was raised toward building the center by the end of June! "When you're the underdog, people tend to take your side and try to help you out," Ryan said.

Back on the right track and making progress, things were looking up until the Mayor came up with a new idea. He started pushing for remodeling the historic Wyeth Laboratory and Creamery building in downtown at Meridian and Broadway Streets into a major government complex for Western Ada County. This 80,000 sq.ft., multi-level structure would house City Hall, the Seniors' center, City Water Department and other city departments, a city museum, Ada County Soil Conservation District office, Meridian Library, school district offices, U.S. Post Office and the Farmers Home Administration. (Phew!) The building would first be placed on the National Historic Registry, followed by applying for the HUD grant in October, although the City Council had already given the go-ahead to the seniors applying for that grant to build their center in Storey Park. Glaysier's action served to create a distraction for the seniors' project but evidently his idea didn't get any traction because the grant application was made to build a senior center only, as planned. (The Creamery was eventually torn down. Today's City Hall sits on that former site – so much for historic preservation.)

All kinds of community support flowed in from many different groups. The Episcopal Church of the Holy Nativity sponsored a golf tournament at Cherry Lane Course (I found no report on proceeds); the Meridian Chamber held its second Annual Community Auction to benefit the building fund and netted \$8,000; The Meridian United Methodist Church raised almost \$1100, and the Cherry Plaza Merchants hosted the 3rd Annual Best Cherry Pie Contest raising \$318; there were many other events and donated funds. By the time Governor Evans announced the grant recipients for the 1983 HUD grant, the building fund totaled over \$100,000! But the Meridian Seniors lost out again!

Sixteen Idaho communities were awarded a piece of the \$5.98 million in block grants but the Meridian seniors group dream of funding the center was not one of them. Meridian's request was 29th out of the 62 applications submitted. Why did their request and need fair so poorly in the selection? "...because it wouldn't create jobs as a result of the grant."

This setback was just one more disappointment in a long string of them. Is there ever to be a Senior Center? It IS time for good news. Check into our next edition of the *Meridian Minute* as the Meridian Area Senior Citizens make strides toward fulfilling their dream of their own much needed center.

History of the Center, Part 4: Real Progress

In the previous *Minute*, Part 3 of our Center's History, we left off with the seniors getting ready to apply for the HUD grant for the 3rd time (1st attempt went to the City's sewer project; the 2nd one lost because the sewer money hadn't been used yet) and raising the funds for the matching requirement to build their center. As you may recall, they had raised \$20,000 by June of 1982 but had a long way to go to acquire the \$200,000 needed.

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This setback was just one more disappointment in a long string of them. Is there ever to be a Senior Center? Now remember, the seniors were meeting for luncheon provided by Meals on Wheels at OJ Café every Thursday in the Cherry Plaza Mall and for brunch every Saturday morning at 8am. The 1st Tuesday of each month was "Fun Day" at the Wheel Inn Recreation Hall for cards, games and a variety of other planned activities. The 3rd Tuesday, they had a 12noon Potluck meal and business meeting at the Wheel Inn. They were also meeting in churches for social activities and business, and maintained a hobby shop in the boiler room of the Challenge Creamery Building. It ***WAS*** time for good news!

The seniors weren't going to let these disappointments discourage them, so they just worked harder. They reorganized to form a 10-member steering committee

with Bill Brewer, City Councilman, as chairman; a public relations committee and an audit committee and elected a treasurer. They even hired a professional fundraiser, Glenn Lungren, and opened an office (free of charge from Cherry Plaza owners) staffed by volunteers. Each member contributed \$5 a month pledging for 36 months and sought similar contributions from the 2,200 senior citizens on their mailing list. They would seek funds from 29 Idaho foundations as well as area businesses. They prepared to launch their campaign November 1, 1983. The goal being at least \$150,000. This was a “one-time capital campaign” that would provide them “with a place they could call their own.”

Immediately, a businessman pledged anonymously \$11,000. Then in the first 10 days of opening their office in Cherry Plaza, 77 citizens – young and senior, stopped in to sign pledge cards. They also received pledges of materials for construction. A “symbol of hope” was to be placed at the corner of 1st and Idaho streets on November 1st. A larger-than-life thermometer would be set up as a daily reminder of how much had been donated toward the campaign to build a multi-purpose senior citizen center. And on a rainy Monday afternoon, the sign was unveiled indicating \$62,000 had already been pledged or donated! And during the event, another \$9,000 was pledged by 3 businesses (Chapel of the Chimes, Big M Upholstery, and Ron Tolman) at \$1,000 each and \$6,000 from the Meridian Chamber of Commerce! By the 16th, the total was over \$80,000 when a group of 6 local lawyers (Fitzgerald, Crookston, Frahm, Riddlemoser, Foley and Lance) and 2 dentists (Cammann and Vorlicky) donated a total of \$3500 and Joe Albertson, himself, gave \$500. Idaho First National Bank in Meridian contributed another \$7750.

Then the news came that without the State supporting the seniors receiving the Federal Grant funding, building a \$500,000 Senior Center on City land was not a viable option. They had been searching for a building while still trying to raise money to build one. So, a change of plans came about. The MASCA decided to purchase a building rather than build one. For \$200,000, the Seniors’ Association would buy the Assembly of God Church at 133 West Broadway. It provided a large enough multi-purpose room and plenty of room for parking. The kitchen would need some upgrading but the seniors would have a building *now* and not have to wait for construction of a new one. Its location would better serve the seniors in the area than the land by the Speedway and they would own the property.

Here we are then, the beginning of 1984, and the Meridian Area Senior Citizens Association will finally have their new Center from a dream that began in 1969. Negotiations for the purchase were underway. So, what's next? Check our spring edition of the *Meridian Minute* for the developments.

History of Our Center: Part 5 "STILL DOIN' IT!"

To recap where we left off last edition...In a change of plan, the Meridian Area Senior Citizens Association, Inc., decided to purchase a building rather than construct one. They signed an agreement to purchase the 8,000 sq ft Meridian Assembly of God Church building at 133 W Broadway for \$200,000. This would allow the seniors group to own the property, save money and move in right away. They were hoping to have a grand opening in February 1984 if everything went as expected. A dream begun 15 years ago may finally become a reality!

This meant that the fundraising efforts must continue. They had raised \$100,000 in cash and pledges but besides the purchase price, they would need to bring the kitchen to standards required to run a Meals on Wheels program. This would cost an additional \$50,000. To ensure the financial stability of the Center, they would need \$250,000 total. The pace of contributions was lagging until a very generous lady came forward.

Valerie Louderbough, former president and organizer of the senior center, pledged to match the next \$30,000 donated then gave the first \$1000 to this new effort! (Wish I could do that!) Her offer, she said, was "to help stimulate others to sacrifice a bit. Meridian really needs a community center. It will be a prideful thing for all of us. I am pleased to be an important part of its realization."

Another kind of donation came to the seniors when Idaho Greenthumb, Inc., a federally funded organization designed to provide jobs for the elderly, donated \$10,000 worth of new books. This would give the "new" center's library a start with over 1000 books. The leader of this Nampa-based organization had made this offer some time earlier but the seniors had to decline the offer with no place to put the books. Thus, the new building brought another benefit to the community.

Then the Gannett Foundation (owner of the Statesman) awarded the Association \$5,500 toward the building campaign. By January 11th, they were reaching a critical point in the fundraising. The seniors had until January 31st to raise approximately \$50,000 more. President Ryan said that smaller donations were still trickling in but they still needed a major contributor to step up. They offered to name the building after such a donor. But with no one coming forward, they began looking at the numbers and came to a serious conclusion.

Many of the area's seniors could not even afford the \$5 a month for 36 months' pledge. This indicated even a greater need for the center where the many low-income seniors could come to be warm and receive a meal; where a distribution area would be established; where seniors could meet and socialize thus reducing isolation and loneliness for the most vulnerable in our community. "I'm beginning to wonder if the need is much greater than I originally anticipated," President Ryan concluded.

January 25th, negotiations with the church board of directors gave some reprieve. They would accept the \$67,000 cash on hand the seniors had in a money-market account. However, they would need an additional \$12,000 for realtor fees. If they could just get \$6000 donated, that would free up the Louderbough matching funds. The church board gave the seniors one year to pay off the balance at 10% interest rate. The church would rent back the building while their new church was being built for Sunday and Wednesday evening services for \$650 a month. And some really good news, the Area III Council on Aging would install the kitchen with help from the Ida-Ore Planning and Development Association at Weiser.

A big surge for the last bit of funds was underway. Mountain Bell gave \$2000, Ore Ida donated \$2000 and Nahas a \$1000; \$1585 of individual pledges came in; the Cherry Plaza Merchants declared "Senior Citizens Weekend" and donated 2% (\$1052) of total sales to the seniors while the seniors held a bake sale at the Plaza. The Merchants also pledged the proceeds (\$756) from the 4th Annual Cherry Pie Contest while Meridian Lanes hosted a 4-day bowling tournament and gave \$4.50 of each \$5 daily entry fee to the seniors. **They did it!!** With \$1000 to spare for installing phones and other moving-in expenses, the seniors were going to move into their own place!

The seniors would have their building after 4 years of unbelievable efforts to raise the funds. They made the down payment but now they would have two installments to make, one by July 31, 1984 and the other by January 31, 1985. Tune in next *Meridian Minute* edition to learn – did they make it?

Center's History: Recap – a Tribute to the Meridian Seniors of the Past (6th Part)

As I have researched the beginnings of our Meridian Area Senior Citizens Association, Inc., and the monumental efforts to acquire a center, I have been in awe of the efforts, perseverance, fortitude, energy and sheer guts to get the job done. One of the newspaper articles I found, describes the determination that took place. It is appropriate for us to recognize, remember and appreciate the legacy these people provided us. I want to share what this young reporter, Jeff Stoffer, wrote in his column published in the *Valley News*, February 22, 1984, as a **tribute** to the Meridian seniors of 1970 -1985:

If the Valley News had a local political cartoonist, this week I would have a great idea. There would be no caption, just a drawing of my overweight body, camera bag slung over my shoulder, running about four lengths behind President Elizabeth Ryan and the Meridian Area Senior Citizens, trying to take pictures and jot notes as the group campaigns for funds; collects checks, pledges, donations; signs contracts, speaks to organizations, visits businesses, buys a church building, etc.

About the first week of December, I took over a news coverage beat on the local seniors' fund-raising drive to get into a multi-purpose center. I did not know what would be in store for me in the coming three months.

Since taking the beat writing my first senior citizens story in the Valley News in early December, I have written approximately 165 inches of news copy, taken seven published photographs, type-set five letters to the editor, written two editorials and mentioned the seniors in my column twice, counting this. All on this subject.

Now that the seniors have sealed the purchase of their new center, with plans to move in next week, I will have to move into a rest home for a few months just to recuperate from the experience. I challenge any member of the community to try to keep up with the local senior citizens. I can't and I'm 21 years old!

Having made the inaccurate assumption that this news beat would be a comfortable series of stories that would fit nicely into my schedule, I didn't realize the determination and seriousness these people had. After all, they are seniors. One would think that a young reporter could keep up with them. Unfortunately for me, as I didn't know what to expect, I had never met senior citizens quite like the ones in Meridian. Early last month, I joked that by the end of the year, the MASCA would occupy and control the Statehouse – if they kept up the way they were going at the time.

Now, I would go so far as to nominate, as a write-in candidate for the United States' President, Elizabeth Ryan, with Glenn Lungren (MASCA's campaign advisor), as the country's budget director. Imagine how the national debt would be whittled down with the determination and attitudes of these people. Seriously, this has been a project that would have bettered most people I know.

Though there have been contributions from many concerned Meridian businesses, foundations, and individuals, it has been the seniors' group at large that has made this idea a reality. Almost 80 percent of the money the seniors have raised came from their own pockets. These are not the pockets of people who have regular pay raises but rather the money has come from fixed incomes, portions of people's retirement checks, social security – tough money.

In these days, when a fortune can be made or lost overnight and money is made dishonestly, these people are paying for their new center with earned money. Honest money.

Some would call it old-fashioned how the seniors have done this. Rather than flying to Dallas or some place like that, to solicit a huge donation or grant from any one source, they can honestly say they and the community have done it themselves. Earned it.

The community has pulled together specially to help the seniors reach their goal. This is a good sign of Meridian's unity to help when help is needed. Even businesses, having less than banner years recently, saw a project that would benefit the community in many ways and they have risen to the occasion.

The unity of Meridian goes without saying, but the energy of the MASCA and all the seniors in the area who have supported this project has been a lesson to one tired newspaper reporter.

Don't try to keep up with the Meridian Area Senior Citizens!

Next edition of the *Meridian Minute* will take us to the seniors trying to make the installment payments in time to clear the mortgage on their new center.

History of Our Center: Part 7 – THEY'RE IN!!

It is now March 1, 1984. After 4 years of determination, perseverance and lots of work, the Meridian Area Senior Citizens Association, Inc., is finally in their "new" digs – the previous Assembly of God Church building at 2nd and Broadway Streets in downtown Meridian. But the struggle is not over. They have a mortgage that has to be cleared by January 31, 1985 with an installment due in July and a multitude of expenses in furnishing their Center.

Tables, chairs, desks and shelving for the 1000+ new books that were received as a donation from GreenThumb, Inc., were all needed. The kitchen was being remodeled by Area III Agency on Aging (\$6,600) and Central District Health (\$25,000) with the Ida-Ore Planning Foundation assisting along with volunteer labor (many seniors and the SeaBees) and donated materials from Lembke Heating, Marcum Sheet Metal, Hoff Building Supply, and Nampa Floor Covering.

Even though boxes were still packed and they would have to borrow tables and chairs, the first event was planned. An Italian Dinner and Auction co-sponsored with the Meridian Jaycees was to be held March 27th. The Jaycees would be helping to pick up auction contributions and working at the event. Phil Yerby with the help of Eileen & Ron Yerby, Jim Arriola and JoAnn Jones would be preparing the meal. Earl Bolen and Marvin Tazares donated the meat. Auctioneer Darrell Calhoun of United Sales Associates would be donating his time to the auction. Many businesses and individuals had already contributed items for the auction from golf clubs, camping gear and bicycles to baked goods and handmade afghans and quilts. Congressmen Larry Craig, Jim McClure and Steve Symms all made donations. \$3200 was realized from this event.

Not to just sit around, hoping for donations at this point, the seniors plowed ahead a multiple of plans. Starting with a Pinochle Party on April 2nd, a Style Show April 6th sponsored by the area Beauty salons, & a potluck luncheon on April 13th hosted by the Council on Aging. One of the rooms was opened for hobby crafts that the participants then would sell from napkin holders to lawn furniture, & another room for gently-used clothing to be sold “garage-sale” style. All proceeds being added to the fund to pay off the mortgage. Even though they were still having to have their Thursday luncheons and Saturday brunches at OJ’s Café while waiting for the kitchen remodel to be completed, coffee and cookies were available every morning and the “coffee pot was always on at the Center.”

The Pinochle Party was so popular that an every-Monday evening party became the norm at a \$1 per person with refreshments and prizes. Memorials were still being encouraged. First Security Bank was continuing to handle these. Meridian Lanes held a special tournament throughout March to raise money to help pay off the mortgage. They provided an \$800 check to President Ryan at the completion. April 25th, it was reported that OJ’s presented a check & many members had paid their pledges ahead for the entire year. The seniors were nearing the \$47,500 installment they had to pay in July – just \$16,000 more.

Don Storey, Meridian’s Mayor for 27 years (1950 – 1977), passed away in May 1984 and the Meridian City Council gave \$100 in his memory while his family suggested that memorials be given to the Meridian Senior Center’s building fund. Revenue was being realized from renting the facility to groups & when the kitchen was completed, the seniors expected to see even more income from this source. Recycling newspapers & selling quilts made at the Center would add to the fund.

July 19th saw the first lunch served in the new building from the completed kitchen remodel with 246 seniors enjoying the meal. What a day! The first meal served at the Meridian Senior Center was generous portions of stuffed veal, green salad, mashed potatoes with gravy, peas, homemade giant raisin cookies, milk and coffee. With only 12 days to go with the mortgage installment due and \$8,000 short, the seniors remained optimistic.

And it paid off when regional shopping mall developer R.T. Nahas provided \$3,000 and Albertson’s Food Stores gave \$4,700 and money from the last meals rounded off the payment. Congratulations, Meridian Seniors of 1984!!

Now to celebrate! An Open-house was held on July 27th at which hundreds of seniors, Gov Evans & Lt.Gov Leroy, Mayor Kingsford, all City Council members, many Chamber of Commerce members & many other dignitaries attended. A ribbon-cutting ceremony took place with music (sung by Jack Riddlemoser), lots of speeches and encouraging messages. Now would be the work to raise the final \$50,000 for the January 31, 1985, mortgage payment. Check in next edition of the *Meridian Minute* to learn the results.

History of the Center: Part 8

We're moving into the fall months of 1984 when the Meridian Area Senior Citizens are feverously working to raise funds to pay off their new Center's mortgage by January 31st of 1985. After having only 3 days left to make the previous installment in July when receiving the last \$8,000 they needed, they are exerting even greater (if that's possible!) effort to avoid that last minute "scare".

A September fundraiser is planned in conjunction with the *Idaho Statesman*. The Paper will provide the weekend edition for five cents each to the seniors who will then canvas neighborhoods, businesses and shopping centers to sell these papers. They will travel around Meridian then to Kuna, Star, Eagle, and Middleton. (Can you believe how hard they worked?!) They plan to sell the copies for \$1 each but are hoping people will offer more. They are also inviting service clubs to help sell the papers. Kiwanis, Lions and Rotary took up the challenge and helped raise \$2085 with this endeavor. Several businesses paid \$100 for their copy.

October brought the Meridian Lions to paint the parsonage house adjacent to the Center which was part of the purchase. Several seniors helped with the job. It had been an eye-sore and was painted to match the Center. This house was being rented for additional revenue for the building fund.

The seniors had been busy since their grand opening adding activities and services to their program. They were now serving lunch on Tuesdays and Thursday with brunch on 2nd and 4th Saturdays. The brunches were fundraisers and were well attended. Blood pressure clinics were held after lunch on Thursdays. Quilting classes had begun Tuesday mornings at 10am, as well as "Growing Younger" exercise classes at 1pm on Mondays. A weaving class was to start the end of

January. Pinochle on Monday evening and “Fun Time”: cards, games & pool (on the 2 donated pool tables) played on Thursdays were continuing. Cleta Klobucher donated an organ and played regularly during lunch and other occasions. She also played the piano that had been donated earlier. The Center hired a part-time coordinator of activities and a part-time custodian.

The seniors were now selling new and renewed subscriptions of the *Valley News* for a percentage. They put coupon-cents-off on items at Paul’s Market and the Meridian Drug Store. If a person picked up an item with a coupon labeled MASCA, they would receive the discount and were asked to give that amount to the Center’s fund. Seniors were encouraged to shop regularly at these local merchants. A week-long Victoria, B.C., trip was offered. Six seniors took advantage of the trip. They spent a day in Victoria, visited Butchart Gardens, took the ferry to San Juan Island and stopped at Leavenworth, WA, for the Bavarian autumn harvest festival. And November 3rd, the seniors held a bazaar and rummage sale, served donuts all day, and pie and coffee after lunch. Many holiday activities were held at the Center including the Area III Agency on Aging’s annual day-long meeting and Christmas party. Governor Evans was the guest speaker. All of these activities yielded proceeds for the building fund.

At the Center’s Christmas Party, they recognized those most responsible for the reality of the seniors having a Center. Oma Jenkins, the first president, had been instrumental in organizing the seniors in the early ‘70’s. Valerie Louderbough, served as the 2nd president for 4 years. She was responsible for the association becoming incorporated and started many of the service projects the Seniors provided. Then she gave \$30,000 plus pledged another \$30,000 for matching donations toward the building fund. Elizabeth Ryan also served as president for 4 years. It was through her leadership that the funds were raised and the church building was purchased for the multi-purpose Senior Center. Jim Ryan put in countless hours doing whatever was necessary to fix up, clean up and remodel the building. The seniors designated the dining hall to the Ryans and named it the “Jim and Elizabeth Hall” and the recreation hall as the Valerie Louderbough Hall.

Dale Ryan (no relation to Elizabeth) was installed as President of MASCA on January 3rd, 1985, with the goal to complete the fundraising necessary to pay off the mortgage then build the programs offered at the Center. That same day, he

accepted \$2,000 from Mountain Bell. But by January 23rd, they were still \$30,000 short of their goal. So, the church board was approached for an extension. They extended the mortgage with the MASCA paying them the \$20,000 they had on hand. But remember, 10% interest is accruing on this balance.

So, what happens next? The *Meridian Minute's* next issue will provide the details.

History of the Center: Part 9 How to Clear the Mortgage?

We left off with Dale Ryan being installed as the Meridian Area Senior Citizens Assoc., Inc.'s 4th President on January 3rd, 1985. His goal was to raise the remaining funds to pay off the mortgage by January 31st. By the 23rd, they were \$30,000 short of the \$50,000 due. So, they approached the Church Board and were granted an extension as long as they paid the \$20,000, they had on hand.

Then the 1st week in February, Idaho First National Bank presented Mr. Ryan with a \$3750 check and Melvin Lane gave \$1000. Things were looking up. On Valentine's Day, the seniors held a bake sale at the Bank and made \$400. Then the Beltone hearing aid representative provided care and assistance to members with hearing aids at the Center and Gene Watson attended to speak on political awareness. Glen Lundgren was sponsored to hold a public relations seminar the next week to employees and individuals to help develop expertise in sales and motivation. Admissions for these would be a donation to the Center.

On March 9th, the seniors held their 2nd annual Spaghetti Dinner and Auction. They started the day with a breakfast – an all-you-can eat buffet at 8am. The Spaghetti Dinner would start at 4pm followed by the auction at 6. That was a full day for anyone, let alone seniors. They were determined folks! \$3000 was raised just from the auction. (Their hard work and long hours paid off.)

The seniors just kept adding activities. Bingo would be offered after lunch on Wednesdays. The Cancer Society gave lectures on Thursdays. Lessons on gardening and Nutritional talks once a month with healthy food recipes all brought in small fees. Dr. Fender was speaking on Medicare regularly to provide information and answer questions. Several talented members entered the Ada County Talent Show at the Kuna Senior Center. Meridian's President, Dale Ryan's vocal solo took 1st place! Now he would represent Ada County at the Area III

Talent Show. Two winners would represent Area III in Pocatello at the Idaho State Conference on Aging in May. Meridian's Center was selected to host the event April 19th. Pie and coffee would be on sale at the contest. (Dale placed 3rd.) Meridian seniors donated the pies and the sale yielded \$200.

Plans were made to once again (4th time) apply for the Community Development Block Grant (HUD) because when Governor Evans visited in December at the Area III Agency on Aging conference, he suggested the Seniors would be successful this time. They would make application for building improvements to include air conditioning, weatherization and a walkway cover. Application was due March 29. April 30th, they were awarded \$4,388 for the improvements – finally, success!

In May, the seniors celebrated National Senior Center Week. The first center was opened 40 years earlier in New York by that city's welfare department. By 1985, more than 8,000 centers across the nation, served more than 7 million older persons. The week had been selected to honor the major role senior centers play in providing services so important to the well-being of our older citizens. May 14th was a special day for those 80+ as they were the guests of honor at a Golden Years party after the luncheon. Special entertainment was provided including an original poem, "Golden-Agers", written and read by Ada Journey. Lee William (90) and Ennis Dunten (95) were crowned "Queen and King for a Day". 230 seniors attended with 59 of them over 80.

The week was concluded with the State Conference on Aging where 500 seniors representing the 140,000 living in Idaho voiced concerns on issues affecting all older citizens. The theme of the statewide conference was "Keep Healthy – Stay Independent". The agenda focused on consumer health care, health problems, and healthy lifestyles. Twelve Meridian members attended with one, Clarence Perebloom (90), receiving the "Oldest Conference Participant" award. He and his wife, had attended the previous 3 conferences. (They donated the P.A. system to the Meridian Center and Clarence kept it operational. The Mrs. was serving her 3rd year on the Board of Directors for the Center.)

May ended with a 2-day yard sale that garnered \$700. And plans were started for the bazaar to be held in the fall. Monday luncheons were added starting August 5th and a bus trip to Lucky Peak and Idaho City was scheduled for the 9th. A call for all recyclables (bottles, jars, aluminum cans & newspapers in bundles) was put out

as a fundraiser. Throughout the summer, the lunch goers were well-entertained. Some included Glen Belcher's Blind Musicians, the Old Time Fiddlers and gospel singer, Erica Oswald. A new telephone number came into use, 888-5555, which is the same one we have today. Informative speakers included St. Al's rep on Alzheimer's; Elwin Grout on legal problems; Ada County commissioners who announced that all seniors could attend Les Bois races free of charge July 28th.

As funds were earned, the seniors continued making incremental payments on the mortgage. And finally, with a grand donation from Elsie and Fred Stieglemeier of \$3000. THEY DID IT!! The mortgage was paid off September 11, 1985! So what comes next? Check the next issue of the *Meridian Minute* to learn of the seniors' progress.

History of the Meridian Senior Center: Part 10 – “Celebration!”

They did it! The mortgage is paid! September 11, 1985, the seniors made the final payment of \$200,000 for their building at 2nd and Broadway. Now it's time to celebrate! I'm sure bells were ringing throughout the City at the mortgage burning on October 11th after fifteen years of dreaming and 4 years of determined fundraising by so many individuals, businesses, groups, organizations, and city officials so that the senior citizens could have their own place. Center President lit the mortgage while Mayor Kingsford, Lt. Governor Dave Leroy and 300 residents watched it go up in flames. And so, the Meridian Senior Center began.

A quick look back, beginning in late '60's, a representative group of the 604 seniors living in Meridian met every 3rd Tuesday for a potluck dinner at the Occident Club. In January 1970, an “official” Senior Citizens Club was formed and officers elected. 1977 brought a change when they would meet 1st and 3rd Tuesday at the Wheel Inn Mobil Manor recreation hall for lunch with cards and games to follow. On February 7, 1978, the Meridian Area Senior Citizens Association received its Certificate of Incorporation. In '81 they added lunch on Thursdays at noon when they gathered at O.J.'s Restaurant in the Cherry Plaza. They enjoyed entertainment and nutritious meals delivered by volunteers from the Boise Center, then served by Meridian volunteers.

Now in 1985, with the purchase of their own Center, the seniors could have daily meals in their own dining hall Monday through Thursday. The new Center served 75 – 165 seniors each day provided by Central District Health with Meals on Wheels for Western Ada County delivering meals from the newly remodeled kitchen as well. As a special treat and fundraiser, on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays each month, the seniors put on a hearty breakfast/brunch buffet from 8 - 9:30 am and on Fridays they held potluck luncheons.

“But we can’t let up now, just because the building is paid for. There’s still lots that needs to be done. Too many improvements have to take place to make the building comfortable and our own. We have services and activities to add,” reported Glennie Sleight, Assoc. Secretary.

True to her words, the seniors held a Bazaar on October 19th. The ladies diligently worked to make items for the bazaar and along with serving a turkey dinner they realized over \$2500. In November, physical changes inside the building allowed for the creation of a gift shop - the “Unique Boutique” where the left-over bazaar items were later sold. The shop and offices received new ceilings and insulation. Hazel Ryska led a weekly crafts-making group with many of the projects put in the gift shop for sale. Dolores Reardon organized folks to clip coupons that were then placed on the items at Paul’s Market. The buyer would pay full price and donate the amount of the coupon to the Center.

They were a busy and determined group. The year was finished off with new and fun activities and events. Every day they celebrated each other and life. “One of the nicest things that we’ve had all year has been the friendliness and spirit of helpfulness here at the Center. It’s been so nice to have hot meals for those who want them. (That’s a commercial from the heart!)”, a senior reported in the *Valley News*, December 26, 1985.

Each week began on Monday with an exercise class at 9:30 am and a card party and pool later in the day. Tuesdays were for the craft class and blood pressure clinics with music after lunch. The Old-time Fiddlers played often. Sing-alongs were especially popular. Wednesday brought the game Zingo after lunch and on Thursday, seniors could collect their commodity box. Fridays were dedicated to anniversaries and special birthday celebrations along with their potluck meal. Every day that someone wanted to participate, there was quilting taking place to

complete different giving projects. Of course, December brought several Christmas parties. School children entertained with a play and music on one occasion. The end of 1985 also saw the 3 Kmart stores holding a “shopping spree” for seniors over 55, offering them prizes and free-gift and postal wrapping for items purchased in the store along with eligibility to enter a contest for a \$50 gift certificate.

The Senior Center wasn't the only change in Meridian in 1985. Change was in the air. The Mall was proposed for Meridian but ended up in Boise - politics. The bond for Centennial High was finally passed for \$7.2 million on the 3rd try. (Since then, at least 8 more secondary schools have been built.) Hi-Micro Tool Corp. moved from Garden City to Locust Grove and Pine. Power Dynamics left California to settle at the end of East Broadway after receiving a block grant. Mountain States Tumor Institute opened a satellite Breast Cancer Detection Center on East 1st while Coast to Coast moved a store into the Cherry Plaza. Western States Equipment received a \$3.5 million industrial revenue bond to construct a new facility in '86. This all looks like the beginning of the explosive growth Meridian has experienced to this day.

Back to Center happenings. In 1986, the weekly activities set in the previous year continued due to popularity. Special speakers were scheduled, the first being an informative talk on personal travel and safety insurance by Mario Delisio. And of course, planning for the special Valentines Day potluck was underway. Fred Meyers sponsored a “Club Dinner Party” the end of February with the Center raising \$500 with a Mexican cuisine dinner. In March, the seniors once again, applied for a Federal Community Block Grant to make further repairs and improvements on/in the building. (September 1987, \$5000 – ½ of request was finally granted.) The repairs were to include new windows, flooring and door. The year was filled with continued activities and fundraisers. Spaghetti feed and auction brought in \$3500 with a rummage sale a week later saw another \$350. (It's a lot of work to be a non-profit!) A pie contest in September and so many more projects throughout 1986 bring us to the end of the first full year in the Meridian Area Senior Citizens new Center. Check next issue for the Center's progress to 2000.

History of the Meridian Senior Center: Part 11 – “Movin’ on!”

It’s 1987 and the Senior Center is humming with activity. With the successes of the past 14 months, the seniors have settled into their new digs. Activities are happening every day on a weekly schedule. Fundraising is in full swing; not letting up a bit just because they were able to finally burn the mortgage of \$200k after 4 years of dedicated efforts. They are now raising money for a new parking lot and waiting for the grant money to repair the floor and to put in new windows and door.

The seniors added activities to include a walking group, the Meridian Line Walkers, 3 days a week; Grief Recovery Group meeting every Wednesday; Growing Wiser class on Thursdays and speakers every week. Holding special activities is always high on the list for fun. A favorite was the Easter Bonnet Competition. The last one of the decade included dozens of seniors “strutting their stuff” for the audience and judges. Una Rose, Blanche Johnson and Madeline Hunter were the category winners. Lunch was served, fourth graders from Spalding Elementary sang, a banjo band, “The Entertainers”, played and a pool tournament was held: Kuna vs Meridian. Great fun for everyone!

City highlights that year included the Seniors Association’s former President auctioning her late husband’s 1912 Buick for \$22.5k and the breaking ground for the “new” city hall on Idaho Street to be built in 6 months for \$520k – with no Federal monies! The City Council had been setting aside dollars for 10 years in anticipation of having need for a new building.

The Ada County Commission provided the county area senior centers with 4 new vans and in 1988, Meridian seniors had some new wheels! The van was kept busy. In addition to the lunch transport, for many years forward, there were trips to Karcher Mall and later to Boise Town Square; groups went to Shoshone Ice Caves, Oregon Trails Interpretive Center, Craters of the Moon, Idaho City Arts Festival, Shoshone Falls/Hagerman Valley, Idaho Penitentiary, McCall Ice Festival and the Idaho Fair, just to mention a few.

Some significant happenings at the Center in the 1990's included a dining hall enlargement. The "CB's" worked one weekend per month and were provided one meal per day by Center volunteers. The addition was completed in 5 months at a cost of nearly \$15k for the building materials, carpet and paint. An additional amount of \$7k was spent on tables & chairs, double doors and a ramp, and a gas furnace. (Needs never end!) The van shed was completed in August 1991 for \$2937 after Center volunteers removed the dirt, set the forms and poured a slab for the building foundation. It measured 20' x 28' and was built on the back southwest corner of the parking lot. (It's still there today.) The old house south of the Center was purchased and torn down, the lot leveled then paved for an excellent parking lot. Food storage was expanded with a new cooler furnished by Health and Welfare.

Meridian's Centennial was celebrated in 1993 with a week of activities: the Miss Meridian Pageant, a community breakfast, an old-fashioned barbeque, an auction, a parade, fireworks, a golf tournament, a salmon feed, a symphony in the park, and culminating in a Ball. Celebrants wore period dress, danced to Gib Hochstrasser's Big Band, and witnessed the winners of the final judging of the Mustache and Beard contest.

In the fall of 1993, Bingo! was started. An electric numbers display board was purchased from the Boise Center and installed in the dining hall. It was still in use when the seniors moved out in 2012 to the new building in Kleiner Park. Friday night Bingo was operated by volunteers until Mary Wheeler was hired to manage the games in 2006. And she is still doing it today! Bingo generates operating funds for the Center and is a consistent means of fundraising. In 1994, the quilting room was expanded, and the telephones were replaced throughout the building.

We need to recognize the dedicated efforts of the Quilting Group who never failed to be working daily. They donated their time, talents and materials to create beautiful pieces of artistry for sale at raffles, auctions and in the Boutique to provide funds contributing to the operational expenses of the Center. For example, the group was instrumental in significant contributions of \$3125 in one 1996 event which helped pay for a large portion of the Center's expenses that year.

Many people volunteered their time and expertise to operating the Center throughout the 90's. Officers and directors served on the Board giving guidance and ideas for the future. So many should be recognized and remembered for their dedication, but space here doesn't provide being able to list them all. (If you are interested, the lists are available in our Admin offices.) Those serving as presidents through to 2000, and not previously mentioned, are Melvin Lanes, Kenneth Sellars, Harold Hall, Eugene Shanks, Dale Ryan, John Ott and Jerry Knox.

Fundraising for a non-profit never ends – doesn't even slow down. 1999 ended the year, the decade, the century with the Cherry Plaza Merchants once again stepping up along with the Chamber's Festival of Wreaths Committee giving \$3000 to the Senior Center. The monies were raised when more than 80 wreaths were created by Meridian citizens and then were purchased by other citizens. Everyone joining together for a worthwhile cause!

What the new century brings to the Meridian Seniors will be shared in our next edition of the Meridian Minute. Join us.