

Opportunities Abound

Nonprofit organization offers education and recreation programs to the community

By Jeanie Senior

Thanks to a low-budget, high-volunteer effort, community education classes ranging from grant writing for beginners to yoga, baking, scrapbooking and CPR are being offered to residents of west Klickitat County and east Skamania County.

The organization to thank: Northside Community Education and Recreation, which got its start just three years ago.

Northside initially looked at forming a parks and recreation district, says Michael Rabinowitz, president of its board of directors. But the focus shifted after the majority of those who responded to a survey indicated that adult education and noncredit classes were the main things people wanted.

“We are trying to have a variety of classes for adults and for kids, and also on each of our schedules, we’re trying to have different classes,” Michael says.

Northside Community Education pretty much defines volunteer-led. It has no office and no real budget. Michael, who works part time at the Mount Adams Chamber of Commerce and part time at his real estate appraisal business, fields questions by e-mail.

The people who teach the community education courses set the fees and handle registration. Northside helps them find a location for classes, if needed, and provides advertising.

Michael says Northside’s board of directors has been “just kind of out there in the community” trying to promote the community education program. The word-of-mouth effort, coupled with booths at the Huckleberry Festival and Spring Fest, have paid off.

“Amazing people have come out of the woodwork who have these skills and want to teach them,” Michael says.

A popular grant writing class, for example, was taught by Leigh Hancock, an experienced consultant and grant writer.

Scott See, who offered an online course called “Steps to Starting Your Business,” worked in a New York advertising agency before moving to the Columbia Gorge 17 years ago. Now self-employed, he has degrees in business and marketing from Emory and Fordham universities.

Creme Brulee, scones and biscotti were among the treats that emerged from the baking classes taught by Julie Vance, the pie

baker for Dickey Farms Store for five years. She held a baking class for teens just before Valentine’s Day.

Scott Dinger, who taught the twice-a-week martial arts program for children ages 6 to 12, is a two-time world champion and a U.S. national champion in Sombo, a Russian grappling art.

“It’s amazing,” Michael says, looking at the variety of classes offered and the instructors.

Recent classes have been a mix of business offerings, such as estate planning and grant writing; fun classes, such as baking, pottery and felt coin purse construction; and health training,

such as CPR and first aid, and abdominal stabilization and stretching.

Northside has federal nonprofit status. It partners with several community groups and institutions of higher education. It has received financial support from local businesses.

White Salmon School District’s Bear News circulates Northside updates. Northside published a directory that lists opportunities on the north side of the Columbia River. Included are after-school and summer programs; arts, crafts

and hobbies; clubs and organizations; dance; entertainment; gardening; music; outdoor education; personal enrichment; sports; and theater.

There is also a schedule for the summer bus, which runs between Bingen and White Salmon, and Husum and BZ Corners.

Northside received a \$2,500 grant from Washington State University Extension’s Horizons Project, earmarked for scholarships for youth classes and activities.

So far, the majority of scholarships have paid for kids taking part in White Salmon Community Youth sports programs, according to Michael. Scholarships also paid for arts and crafts classes offered during winter break.

Michael, who has a degree in recreation from San Diego State University, says communication—getting information about Northside into the community—is key to Northside’s success.

“Getting it out there is a little slower process than I anticipated,” he says, “but it’s getting there.” ■

To learn more about Northside Community Education and Recreation or to make a donation to the organization, go to www.nscommunityed.org.

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