

Serving Diverse Interests

Community center meets the needs of area's residents as well as its firefighters



Fire District 14 firefighters prepare for a drill in the firehouse in the High Prairie Community Center.

By Jeanie Senior

The two-year-old High Prairie Community Center is proving to be a boon to the community it serves.

One recent Tuesday evening, members of Fire District 14 conducted a drill in the firehouse that occupies a large part of the 6,000 square-foot building. In the meeting room next door, several couples learned new dance steps.

The High Prairie Community Council holds its regular meetings at the center and firefighters meet three times a month, according to Audrey Bentz, who coordinates building use and rental.

In addition to the dance classes, residents can join exercise sessions. Other events have included bread baking, presentations on identity theft and a class to license food handlers.

"We're trying for a real variety of things to meet the interests and needs of the people of this area, who tend to be more of the retired type," Audrey says. "Retired, but active."

The center hosted a community harvest dinner last fall, as well as a Christmas dinner. Audrey says about 70 people were expected at the Christmas dinner, but 130 showed up.

"The real benefit of this place is that it has



Myrin and Audrey Bentz stand in the community center's commercial kitchen. The couple donated the 1.49 acres of land where the community center is located. One of the property's benefits is its water source, which is ideal for the fire department.

running water," says Tim Darland, a fire captain and emergency medical responder for the fire department.

That wasn't the case at the previous fire station, which had no water. Firefighters had to refill their tender at area residences.

The new building boasts an 18,000-gallon water storage tank. It also has bathrooms for men and women, and a fully equipped commercial kitchen.

Audrey and Myrin Bentz donated the 1.49 acres of land where the community center is located.

"We bought some land adjacent to us and when we found out it had an extremely good well we decided that needs to be for our fire department," says Audrey.

An initial \$389,000 construction grant came from the Washington Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development. The total grant eventually climbed to \$602,000. Audrey says Klickitat County Board of Commissioners also "put much time and effort into the endeavor." Local residents donated many hours of work, which included painting the facility.

Community fundraising peaks this month at the

annual High Prairie Firehouse sale, with proceeds supporting the High Prairie Community Council, Community Center and Fire District 14.

This year's event, held Saturday, May 19 and Sunday, May 20, is billed as the "13th Annual and Best Ever."

The event features an assortment of new and used household and garden items, antiques, furniture, plants, crafts and more. The High Prairie Needlers have donated a quilt to raffle, there is a silent auction, and a food booth features Myrin's famous bratwurst, as well as homemade baked goods.

The sale is held at Aleckson's Hay Barn, 738 Centerville Highway. ■



Local residents Ted and Myrt Mc Kercher learn the East Coast Swing in the community center's meeting room.