



Vida McKenzie Community Center

SPRING 2010

Vol. 9 No. 1

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MAY 8th

10 Years.. Lets Reflect A Little

Club members leave door open for future

January 15, 2000

■ Disband: The McKenzie River Club decides to turn over its hall for use as a community center.

By PAUL NEVILLE
The Register-Guard

VIDA — They're almost all gone now, the old friends who once talked, danced and played the night away inside the stone-walled clubhouse they crafted with their own hands on the banks of the fast-flowing McKenzie River.

Only a handful of members from the once-thriving McKenzie River Club remain — folks such as Margaret Estenson and Buck Carter, who remember what it was like on Saturday nights when the clubhouse was filled with neighbors who sat around wooden card tables, ate meatloaf and macaroni casseroles, played bridge and pinochle, and just plain savored each others' company.

"When you come in here, you remember the good times," says Carter, an 85-year-old retired river guide, as he walks across the scuffed fir flooring of the McKenzie River Clubhouse he helped build a half-century ago.



BRIAN DAVIES / The Register-Guard

Carter and Estenson, an 81-year-old retired teacher, pause in the cold, musty meeting room to ponder a battered upright piano that is flanked by a tilting American flag and a massive stone fireplace.

Buck Carter, 85, and Margaret Estenson, 81, recall the McKenzie River Club in its heyday 50 years ago when the social club played host to card games, wartime volunteer efforts and dances, and was a center of community life in Vida. Members plan to give their clubhouse to a younger generation for use as a community center.

"Someone donated that piano, God knows who, a long time ago," Carter muses. The two chuckle as they remember how club members

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Guest Speakers at the Membership Meeting—May 8th

Faye Stewart, Lane County Commissioner

Darren Bucich, Fire Chief McKenzie Fire & Rescue

Marge Estenson, McKenzie River Club/Vida McKenzie Community Center



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CLUB

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ried to give it away but were forced to retrieve it after someone "made a big fuss."

Memories abound in the old clubhouse, which is made of pumice blocks, topped with a green metal roof and located on a knoll about a mile north of town on Thomson Lane.

"Hundreds of people have been part of this club over the years and it has meant a great deal to all of them," Estenson says. Through the green-curtained windows behind her, large snow-lakes filter down through the trees.

But time, which flows as unrelentingly as the gray river below, has taken its toll on the club's membership. The few remaining members plan to disband and give their beloved clubhouse to a younger generation of local residents for use as a community center.

"To be honest with you, we just don't have what it takes to keep this place going anymore," says Estenson, who joined the club in the late 1940s, shortly after moving upriver with her husband, a logger and farmer.

Estenson was teaching third grade at McKenzie Elementary School and was invited to join by fellow teacher Vy Thomson, who, with her husband, Dayton, owned the historic Thomson's Lodge that was destroyed by fire in 1954.

It was a welcome invitation. Outside of school and church events, the club was the only social show in town.

"Back then, people didn't run into town for their entertainment — they found it out here," Estenson recalls. "What else was there to do out here but join the club?"

The club's been around since 1941, when it was formed by members of the recently disbanded local Grange. Meeting at first in a former school gymnasium that's now the site of the fire station, the club grew rapidly, drawing dozens of new couples each year.

In its early years, the club was active in the war effort, planting victory gardens, buying war bonds and sponsoring Red Cross classes in which couples folded dressings for wounds.

The social agenda consisted of dancing, with music provided by a phonograph playing Benny Goodman and Tommy Dorsey 78 rpm records. Bridge and pinochle were the card games of choice. Admission to dances cost a buck, with the proceeds stashed away for the members' dream of someday building their own clubhouse.

During a picnic at Paradise Park, the Thomsons surprised fellow club members by offering to donate an acre of land on the north side of the river as the site for a clubhouse.

Club members were so excited they immediately abandoned the picnic to hike up to the site atop a high bank covered with towering firs, brush and blackberries.

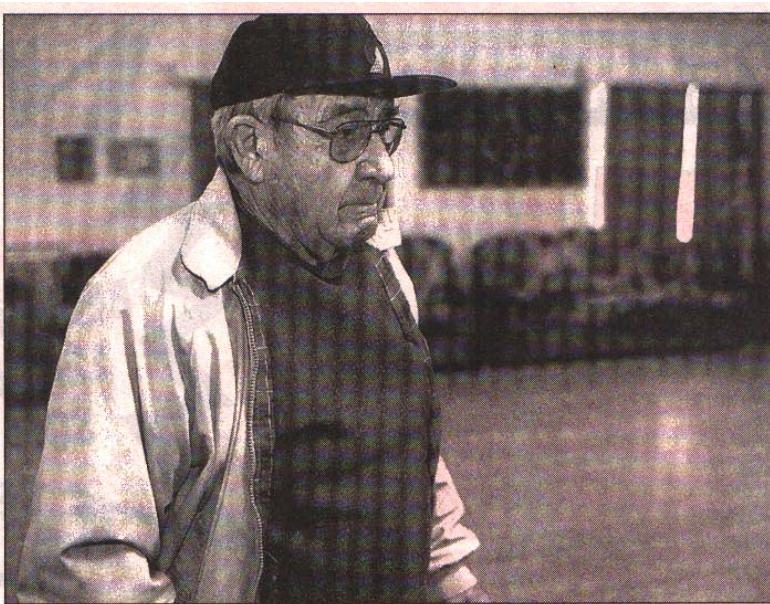
With a membership that included loggers, heavy equipment operators, plumbers, electricians and carpenters, finding construction expertise was not a problem.

Time and money, however, were another matter.

Club members pitched in on weekends, with an old range set up at the site to keep the workers fed and filled with hot coffee.

Club members paid for the project as they went, holding bake and rummage sales and putting on dinners for organizations from Eugene and Springfield. They even sold advertising space on the club's card tables.

But the most successful fund-raising event



Buck Carter, who helped build the clubhouse in the 1940s, has seen membership plummet in recent years as people seek out other types of entertainment.

BRIAN DAVIES / The Register-Guard

was an annual boat parade sponsored by the McKenzie River Guides Association. The club set up a picnic site on a gravel bar owned by a club member and served up 2,500 lunches — ham sandwiches, hot dogs, potato salad and home-baked pies — in 1½ hours.

As the building neared completion, club members had to devise a way of heating the 30-by-40-foot meeting room.

The solution was a classic river dweller's innovation: a homemade woodstove made of two 55-gallon drums that glowed bright red when fully stoked. The system remained in place until last year when club members replaced it with a decidedly less rustic propane furnace.

The clubhouse officially opened with a Halloween party in 1950, an annual event that prompted some intriguing costumes, such as the 250-pound logger who showed up clad in only a hula skirt.

Later improvements included restrooms — which replaced the outhouse that was less than a favorite late-night destination for the club's female members — a kitchen, a fireplace and a parking lot.

For a time, when dancing was all the rage for club members, there was talk of building a side room for card players. But the years passed and aging club members began gravitating to the card tables instead of the dance floor and the addition was never built.

"We pretty much settled into playing cards and watching slide shows — and that was about it," Estenson says.

As the range of activities dwindled over the years, so did the membership. Even though club members advertised now and then in the local newspaper, younger residents showed little enthusiasm for joining a social club.

"If people were still warm and had a pulse, we'd invite 'em in — but no one seemed interested," Estenson says.

Carter reflects that it was not a lack of marketing but rather the changing times that caused the club's membership to fade.

"I think it started about the time people could drive faster than 35 mph into town, and could stay at home and watch TV on Saturday nights," he says.

Estenson says the club has pretty much been inactive since its last Saturday night

get-together in November. Only seven members showed up — a far cry from the '50s when it was so popular it had to limit its membership to 75 couples.

"I told folks, 'If we don't even have enough people here for two tables of bridge and pinochle, it doesn't make much sense to come down here and warm up this big ol' hall,'" she says.

Then there's the issue of maintenance and repairs. Suffice to say that when you hit age 80, the thought of clambering around on a leaky roof or splitting a season's worth of firewood begins to lose its appeal.

Money wasn't the issue. The club is able to pay the estimated \$2,000 in annual expenses by renting out the building to groups such as the local Masonic chapter and a neighborhood watch group. It also regularly leases the building for family reunions, weddings, memorial services, private parties and other events.

Club members agreed maybe it was time for the club to fold its hand and find a way to pass it on to a younger generation.

Last weekend, Estenson, Carter and other club members invited members of the community to the clubhouse to hear their plans to disband and their desire to give the clubhouse to local residents for use as a community building.

About 40 Vida residents showed up, a few of whom confided they hadn't even known of the club's existence.

Estenson and other club members told them they want the building to be used for the community and, above all, don't want to see the property sold and turned into a private home or retreat.

The feeling appeared to be mutual, with local residents showing strong interest in turning the building into a community center.

Closen Christian, a Vida resident who attended last Saturday's meeting, calls the clubhouse a "great place with lots of character."

"It needs some tender loving care — but it's still a good building," he says. "I think there are quite a few people up here who are interested in this."

That pleases Estenson and Carter, who would like to see the building used by people who would fill it with a new generation of memories.

"There were some mighty good times in that place," Carter says. "Some mighty good times."



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Then and now



As you can see a lot of changes have occurred over the years. The McKenzie River community can be thankful for the foresight of McKenzie River Club members Marge Estenson and Buck Carter when they saw the need to get the community involved in order to keep together what was started in the early 1940's.

In 1949 members of the McKenzie River Club were laying the stone work for the walls and framing in the door area. The McKenzie River members were dedicated. All the members chipped in and did what was necessary to get the job done, men and women alike. A hardy lot they were as they braved the weather to put together their building, note the snow on the ground. Trees were cut from the property and used for lumber in the building. What materials the members had, they used. When they ran out of materials, the members did fundraising and went to merchants



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was needed. They were never afraid to ask for a discount on the materials. In the newspaper story from page one it mentioned the heating of the building using two 55-gallon drums as pictured on the left. This was the primary source of heat even after the fireplace was installed a few years later. The "Club" members used the ole 55-gallon drums for heat up to 1999 when the members and Bob Neilson Jr. had the forced air heater installed. This is just a tid bit from the early days. Come and listen to Marge Estenson tell the "rest of the story".



ANNUAL CLEAN UP AROUND THE CENTER ON APRIL 24th STARTING AT 10AM



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ANNUAL CLEAN UP- -April 24th

Spring clean up around the Center is just a few weeks away. We'll start close to 10am and come noon time hopefully we'll have it all wrapped up and can sit down for a little lunch.

Last year we had a great bunch of members that worked really hard cutting, trimming and hauling branches. Over the years we've had Les Blum cutting tree branches while standing on the roof. That year we had to borrow a large trailer from Todd Olson. As fast as Les cut them down, Dick Barnes and Walt Wilson filled up the trailer. Last year Linda Schaefers and a bunch of members hauled branches to a burn pile that Mike Schaefers kept the flames a blaze.

This year for the outside crew there are some branches to cut back again, a lot of branches to pick up that have fallen over the past winter, many leaves to rake and pick up, ivy to cut back, gutters to clean out and walkways could use a good scrubbing/power washing. As you can see the list just goes on and on. But the good part of all this is..... with each year the amount of clean up the Center needs seems to gets less and less thanks to the membership giving a few hours of their time.

While many of the members will be working diligently on the outside area of the Center, Dawn Neilson will have a crew working on the inside doing some spring cleaning. If you are not an outside clean up person, come on down, Dawn could us some help on the inside.

Throw some tools in the ole vehicle, come and join other members and friends for a little light fun time and when's its all over, the Center will provide lunch for everyone. We'll have the coffee pot on.



MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

By now you have already seen the membership form and the attached mailing envelope. It's that time of the year when the Center comes calling and asking for the community support with your membership. The fundraising efforts of the Center has been well supported by the community. This allows the Center to continue to provide funds to other organizations and for scholarships. But the community membership plays a very important aspect of how the Center operates.

Other Community Centers and like organizations have increased their membership fees. The Board and Officers of the Community Center have held fast and not raised the membership dues for over seven years. Please, complete the include form and drop it in the mail.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MAY 8th

President of the Center, Walter Wilson said, "We seem to hold the annual membership meeting on the same day that so many different events are occurring around the McKenzie Valley, it's that or getting the Board to change the date. It's a big year for the Center. The Center is going into it's 10th year since the community took over and incorporated." He's been asked to do a recap of the 10 years and has asked Marge Estenson to help out with some of the history of the McKenzie River Club leading up to "Club's" members turning over the building to the community. Other guest speakers will include Faye Stewart, Lane County Commissioner and Darren Bucich, McKenzie Fire Chief

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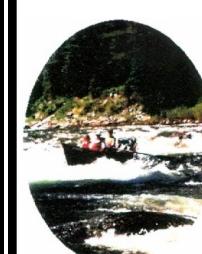
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