

Source: KEZI Channel 9 TV; June 17, 2022

VIDA, Ore. -- Dozens gathered Friday for a ceremony that marked the beginning of construction of the new Vida McKenzie Community Center.

The old site burned down in the 2020 Holiday Farm Fire.

"It's been very exciting for us," said Gerry Aster, the vice president of the community center.

"We have been busily raising funds since the fire."

Aster said the community center was once a place for those of all ages to gather for all types of events.

"People would celebrate anniversaries, birthdays, deaths, births, senior proms... you name it," said Aster. "It sounds like all small things but in a rural community all those markers in life are doubly important."

It's been a long time coming. Project Manager Craig Gustafson said there were a lot of moving parts.

"Because the building was originally built in 1949, Lane County didn't really have jurisdiction," said Gustafson. "We had to look at all these little updating code issues and all the land issues. It took the whole year of 2021 to bring the package together."

Gustafson offered to lead the project early on.

"I live on Goodpasture Road, and I had a 38-year career as a real estate developer in San Diego and we bought our property up here 20 years ago," said Gustafson. "In 2016, we came to live up here full time. When the tragedy happened and the building burned down, I knew what it takes to do these kinds of buildings because that was my career."

Contractors from Dorman Construction also hopped on board the project.

"We're excited. We're up here rebuilding seven other structures right now," said Chris Smith, a project manager with Dorman Construction. "We're trying really hard to give back to the community so people can get back their homes. Being we're already here was an easy fit for us to come and help the community center rebuild."

The building will be constructed from lumber and there are many new features including a commercial kitchen, senior center and a place for school children to do homework. The new building will also keep fire safety in mind.

"It's going to be way different from the old building, that's for sure," said Gustafson. "There's going to be vaulted ceilings inside, exposed beams, the entry is better, it's just going to be beautiful."

Project managers anticipate the building to be completed in 10 to 12 months.

"I'm just really happy the community has supported us, and I was surprised we were able to raise all the money so quickly," said Vida McKenzie Community Center treasurer Tammy Pelton.

Officials at the center said they are still about \$3000 short of the project budget. They are hoping to raise the rest of the funds at a benefit concert taking place next Sunday, June 26 at Gate Creek Ranch from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.