

Dream on.....



2022



vidacomunitycenter.com

Vida McKenzie Community Center

V22.1

**Smack us in the face,
Knock us down,
Burn us to the ground,
You can't keep us down!**



The Dreamers, the early days

Top L to R: Dawn Neilsen, Kimm Esser, Marge Estensen, Vince Davis, Bill Esser.
Bob Neilsen, Vern Blumhagen, Laura Olson, Nadine Scott
Not shown: Joyce Brook and Janie Scofield

When the Vida McKenzie Community Center open it's doors in the year 2000, it's leaders, the movers and shakers lead by Bob and Dawn Neilsen, Vern and Marilynn Blunhagen, Marge Estensen, Joyce Brooks, Kimm and Bill Esser, Nadine Scott, Laura Olson and Janie Scofield all were dreamers. They laid the foundation, set the standard that started the community gem, the Vida McKenzie Community Center. A gem that began in the early 1940's know as the McKenzie River Club. On March 20, 1949 the corner stone was laid that held the building from that day until the year 2000 when the build was given the community to the operated as a community center for the resident of the valley.

An so it began, the dream.



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The dream continues.....

Years rolled by, leadership comes and goes. During the years of growth starting around 2003 for the most part, the leadership continuity continued for many years. The group to the right: Dr. Kathleen Shelley, Faith Bokros, Pat Sherfield, Linda Schaefters, Vern Blumhagen, Dawn Nielsen, Laura Olson and Walter Wilson were the dreamers.

An so it continued: Membership was needed and our McKenzie valley residents came forward. Bingo at the Center was next. Once a month from August 2003 to March 2020 when the Corona virus shut us down. The Christmas Bazaar followed

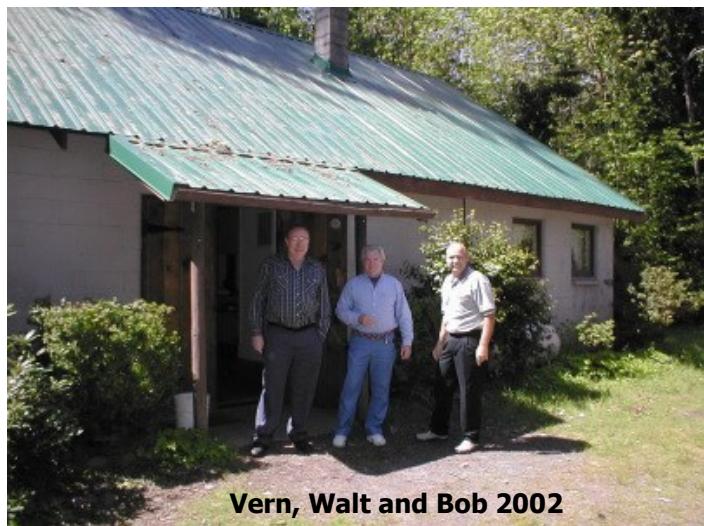
that dream and to the delight of the valley continue each year until the virus closed it down.

The dream continued with giving back to our community. Scholarhips to McKenzie High School graduates, supporting groups and organizations (Mobile Meals on Wheels, McKenzie River Clinic, Animal Angel fund, McK High School Family Re-



source Center) and several additional groups. Interior and exterior improvement continued including the concrete deck overlooking the Helfirch boat landing parking lot and sidewalks around the side of the building with the help of member of the Center. Local contractor and member Ron Short with the help of the membership enhanced the entrance to the building. Each spring the Center membership and the members of the late Bloomers Garden Club gave the flower beds a clean sweep and added colorful flowers to the mix.

And the dream continued as the center enjoyed family gatherings, yoga, sewing, meditation, poker, birthdays, memorials, meetings of local interest, political debates, local artisan faires, concerts by traveling and local musicians.



Vern, Walt and Bob 2002



During the summer of 2020 when the Center was shut down due to the Corona Virus. The kitchen and bathrooms were remolded and the dream continued until September 8, 2020.

Walter W. Wilson, President





This should have been on the front page but it had already gone to print:

LANE COUNTY HAS APPROVED OUR BUILDING PERMIT

FIRE, FIRE.... The Lane County Sheriff Office had closed all the roads leading into the McKenzie Valley fire damaged area. I had learned earlier from McKenzie Fire Chief Darren Bucich the Community Center had been destroyed by the fire and my home burned, he went on to say, "You still have a beautiful green lawn".

With proof of residence, the Sheriff's Office were letting residents into the area with a Sheriff escort. The smoke was still lingering in the air as I followed the Sheriff patrol vehicle escort up the McKenzie Highway and onto Thomson Lane leading to the driveway of the Center. I could see the damaged big douglas fir trees that lined Thomson Lane and the driveway to the Center. We pulled into the parking lot and as I exited my vehicle the deputy called out, "You got about 10 minutes and then we're out of here".

Ten minutes to look over what had been focal point of our community for 70 years and for the last 20 years the hub of the Vida area community. Camera in hand I began to circle the burned out building, peering through windows and doorways looking at skeletons of the baby grand piano, stacks of frames of some 135 chairs, 22 or so table frames, the metal from of the bingo board and machine. The refurbished kitchen and bathrooms were gone, but standing tall was the old chimmey for the double 55 gallon barrel heater and on the east end stood the grand ole fireplace, not quite looking so grand. An then bringing me back came, "10 minutes, let's go Walt".

So much to think about, where does one start? Our Board Members began to talk with each other. There was never a doubt about what we were going to do. Rebuild was what was going to happen. We just needed to figure out how we were going to do it. We soon found out our insurance was lacking for what needed to be done.

With my home destroyed, I knew that I could not give 100 percent effort to the rebuilding of the Center. I ask our Vice President Gerry Aster to take the lead in the rebuild. While Gerry lives next door to my home she only received minimal damage to some window frames. Gerry accepted the chanllenge and was off and running.

Covid had us and the country closed down for the last 6 to 9 months. Attrition had taken it's toll on our Board Members. One of our first thoughts was the need to increase our Board Members to help work us though this process. One of the Center's first Board Members from the beginning in 2000 was Kim Esser. Kim has supported the Center thru the years and re-joined our team as a Board member. Needing a place to hold meeting, Kim offered her work conference room as a meeting location. Shortly after Kim joined our Board, Sherry Jones, Ann Penny and Billy Pruitt became Board members. An urgency caused us to have our next Board meeting in October following the fire. It was decided we needed to have monthly meetings until things settle down.

We were in need of an Architect and a Project Manager. We decided on Jessie Elliott for the Architect. Jessie is very capable, easy to work with and very supportive of our project. Craig Gustafson, project management is his profession and as a Vida resident, join our rebuild team. I've probably driven Craig carzy with all my questions about the project.

Shortly after the first of the year we set up an open house gathering at the old Fish Hatchery and welcomed the community to gathered ideas from you for our new Center. Remember those Butter Braid assortment of pastries? They are coming back real soon. We asked for help and our community responded. We knew fundraising and seeking grants was our direction. Gerry with the help of Kim and Tammy Pelton





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Continue from page 3: set about writing grants, identifying how to keep the public informed and began setting up fundraisers. Will Rutherford joined our rebuild team and became our webmaster. Our website was in need of updating to become the focal point of distribution of rebuilding information. Please connect to the website at www.vidacomunitycenter.com and click on the link to join. By doing this, you will receive a message each time something current is posted on the rebuild.

Fundraising became a fun game for us and our community. We all enjoyed the Butter Braids, played some Bingo, even had a mobile bingo run ending at the Track and finished with a nice BBQ dinner. Fish Fry at Patsy Stage Stop, Rummage sale at the Big Red Barn, enjoyed listening to the tunes of the Henry Cooper Trio, Spring Craft Faire and the Christmas Bazaar. We have a Flea Market coming in July, Float Your Boat Texas Hold'em coming in August. Hopefully something special (maybe a little BBQ) at the ole Community Center grounds in September. Your Board is working hard to make this all happen.

We've had to put on hold several events we have enjoyed for many years: our student scholarships including the Vern Blumhagen Memorial Scholarship to our local graduating students and those enjoying their freshman year of college. We have had to set aside one of our goals of giving back to our community, our donations to several groups or business' in need of support. At our annual membership meeting we honored those above, it was put on hold. This was the time where we selected our Community Center leadership for the follow year. All of our officers and board member have agreed to remain in office. We thank you for your understanding.



Every time we turn around something new comes up but we continue to work through it. By the time you are reading this we will have met with contractors regarding the rebuilding and increasing the width of the driveway. We interview three construction companies and selected Dorman Construction to handle our rebuild. Our program manager Craig Gustafson has been working almost day and night with them since the selection.

We are truly thankful for our community support. You have made great difference in our funding needs. Thanks to Gerry Aster and her support team we have received many grants, large and small, we take them all. I'm sure you have heard of the Federal ARPA fund (\$480,000), the Ford Foundation and the list of names goes on and on including each of you who have come forward with a helping hand. We have had many offers of In-Kind donations for door, roofing, lumber, plumbing, tile, paint, legal fee's and more. We are not there yet, but as it has been said, the light at the end of the tunnel is getting brighter.

It's membership time. Please complete the form, send it in and come join us in the fun.
thank you, Thank You, THANK YOU!!

WE ARE ALMOST THERE!!!

Gerry Aster, VP and Secretary

Within two months of the Holiday Farm Fire, the Vida McKenzie Community Center Board began meeting monthly to pave a path forward to rebuild our lost building. Thank you to every one of you for stepping up to donate to the rebuild effort. There has been an amazing response from individuals, companies, foundations, governmental agencies and, yes, total strangers.

I am probably "preaching to the choir" when I say that time equals increased expense. With each passing day, the cost of materials and labor to rebuild our beloved gathering place has risen. With the help of Craig Gustafson, a professional project manager and generous neighbor, we continue to revise our budget to match current costs. We are so close to meeting our goal of putting those shovels into the ground but that date is now in the hands of Lane County and the State of Oregon. Yep, it is frustrating.

Many people ask me why it "costs so much to build a building where we just play Bingo." Well, to that I say "you don't really know VMCC." While Bingo may be what draws many of you onto Thomson Lane, much more has taken place within the Center's walls. There have been weddings, celebrations of life, community information sessions, club and organizational meetings, concerts, art exhibits, plant sales, scholarships to students...you name it. And the good news is that once rebuilt, VMCC will be adding additional programs to respond to real needs within our emerging community. We will have a Social Model Senior Center where seniors can gather, enjoy lunch, play and learn together. We will become a Home School Hub where students and their parents can socialize and expand their opportunities for learning. We will also convert our new commercial kitchen into an "Incubator," enabling local small businesses to produce a product they can commercially market. Lives will be changed and prosperity will be supported.

Just like you, we are determined to make something good out of this disaster. Thank you for joining with us in this journey.



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WANT TO HELP WITH OUR FUNDRAISERS.

We can always use a helping hand.

Give Gerry a call at 541 896-3001 or Tammy a call at 951 970-0176

Thanks for being a friend of the Vida McKenzie Community Center.
Your membership is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,
Walter W. Wilson

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