

SENIOR

Michelle Keller: building bridges

FROM THE SHERIDAN SENIOR CENTER

SHERIDAN — You wouldn't immediately conclude that Michelle Keller is a bridge builder when you first meet her. But she is. Tongue River Valley resident Keller has joined the Sheridan Senior Center team. Her objective? To increase community awareness of what services are available for older residents to maintain independent living in their homes.

For more than 20 years, the Senior Center has served congregate meals and home-delivered meals to TRV older residents as well as provided in-home services and transportation. But Carmen Rideout, executive director for the Senior Center, believes that the awareness among the community could be strengthened.

Staff members Dawn Maedche and Nancy Dearcorn oversee the center's meals program and provide transportation. Recent staff addition Robin Ruff, a certified nursing assistant, provides housekeeping and personal care for qualified older residents and respite if called upon to do so through the center's Family Caregiver Services. During the past year, VISTA Karen Walters has worked to build volunteer capacity for Senior Center services in the TRV communities.

"Each of these staff members are focused on providing the meals, or the rides, or the in-home services or developing volunteers," said Janet Korpela, director of Help at Home services. "But each person reports to their respective program directors. For example, Robin reports to me."

"The missing link for us is to have one

central person to pull it all together," Rideout said. "It came down to funding to help us keep continual communication with the communities we serve."

The towns of Ranchester and Dayton have supported the operations of senior services by allocating a portion of their Optional One-Cent Sales Tax funding to the Senior Center. But the resource to add someone to pull it together wasn't there.

But that obstacle has now dissipated with a generous donation to develop services for seniors in the valley.

With this support, enter Michelle Keller. Keller was hired for the newly created position of Tongue River Valley program coordinator. Her mission is to be sure TRV residents know what services from the Senior Center are available to them and how to connect to them.

"I'll be looking for people who may benefit while at home and offering services we can do in the valley," Keller said.

Keller, a Ranchester resident and mother of five children in the elementary, middle and high schools in Tongue River, is the bridge from the Sheridan-based Senior Center to her communities.

"I love the Tongue River and am looking forward to working in the community I live in," Keller said.

Keller is ready to get to work. She has already spent one week in Sheridan in an overview of Senior Center services. She visited each program, delivered meals and rode the mini-bus.

"During my week at the Senior," said Keller said, "I saw the high level of energy and desire the staff has for caring for peo-



COURTESY PHOTO | LOIS BELL

Michelle Keller has been hired as the Senior Center's Tongue River Valley Program Coordinator. In this new position with the Center, Keller will add her energies to the work of the center in the valley by helping coordinate services for older residents in the valley's communities.

ple. It's a very caring environment. There's a lot more to it than you would see on the surface at the Senior Center."

With a degree in communications and a background working for various community organizations in her home state of Minnesota, Keller has begun to formulate her game plan.

"First, I want to touch base with the elders already connected through meals at the TRVCC and home-delivered meals," said Keller. "Then look for opportunities to connect through events."

In addition to working with Senior Center program directors and their staff in

the valley, Keller will also be collaborating with Tongue River Valley Community Center Executive Director Erin Kilbride.

In her position as the TRV program coordinator, Keller will report directly to Rideout.

Does Keller have one take-away so far in her new position?

"One take-away is how the Senior Center staff really has a sense of community and a desire to serve whatever needs are out there," Keller said. "The staff is always looking for new and better ways to meet needs to the community."

Yes, Keller is a bridge-builder.

CENTER STAGE

Blame it on uncle Bart and aunt Ann

Blame it on my uncle Bart and Aunt Ann who introduced me to the adventure and love of travel.

When I was 10 years old, Bart and Ann called my parents with an amazing offer: Bart was traveling across country for the summer with his job and they invited me to come along!

My parents were in support of new experiences and adventures and they proposed the offer to me. My 10-year-old response immediately was "yes!". And I was off on an experience that would shape who I am today. I met Ann and Bart in New York City, then off we drove — in Bart's Mercedes — on a summer adventure.

I got to see such amazing sights such as Niagara Falls (and find out that Canada has claims on the falls we

see most in postcards). Drove across five of Canada's provinces, saw the Canadian Rockies, rode a ferry from Victoria Island to the state of Washington and drove through a redwood tree. I saw Chinatown in San Francisco, rode the famous San Francisco trolley, toured the famous Winchester House, and spent a wonderful time with my aunt Marion and uncle Joe.

These wonderful relatives gave me the gift of the love of travel. I traveled quite a bit since then. Now I'm developing travel through the Senior Center for older adults. I'm adding my efforts to those of Jean Harm who does a wonderful job organizing local day trips and will continue to do so.

So far, we've organized trips to Yellowstone, Cody and Heart Mountain, to Washington, D.C., and New York City and last year to the wonderful Medora Musical in North Dakota.

Although not the same group of folks goes every time, there is a core group of folks who love the adventure of travel and have gone

on every trip. Others have joined in as the trips call to them.

I've discovered that many folks want to travel but are hesitant to do so for a variety of reasons. The benefit of group travel is that the planning is done by someone else (from the Senior Center, that's me), you can meet new people, you don't have to travel alone, and you can take advantage of lower prices offered to groups that you don't get when you travel alone. Plus, let's not forget the excitement of new places, experiences and memories!

This year, I've been tasked to step up our game and so now we're offering four trips for older travelers this year. I've mixed up the trips with shorter, regional overnight trips — such as to see the Bar J Wranglers in their natural habitat in Jackson and the wonderful Medora Musical in Medora, North Dakota — and two longer trips. The first trip to Washington, D.C., and Colonial Williamsburg is coming up soon but there's a lot of interest in a 10-day train trip through New England to Quebec and

Montreal this September.

Our hope is that folks who want to travel may consider traveling with a group organized by the Senior Center. For those who have never really traveled — but want to "dip their toes in the waters" — this may be a safe way to go for you!

Jean and I have planned day trips and travel offers for all of 2016. You can stop by the Senior Center to pick up one of the 2016 schedules or see our new webpage at www.sheridanseniorcenter.org.

I'm excited to put this travel program together. I'm finding there are people who want to travel with others, meet new friends or travel with old friends. So, please call the center and I can share with you the details on what we have cooked up for 2016 travel with the Senior Center. If I seem to have too much enthusiasm for this program, blame it on my uncle Bart and aunt Ann!

LOIS BELL is the communications director at the Senior Center. Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan Community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.



LOIS BELL

SENIOR CENTER HAPPENINGS

• **Applications for Low Income Energy Assistance** must be post-marked no later than Feb. 8, 2016, for assistance this year. Need help with the paperwork? Contact Gwen

Burgess at the Senior Center, 672-2240, Mondays through Thursdays. Assistance to qualifying individuals and families of all ages.

• **Tax preparation assistance**

appointments at the Senior Center for February are now being taken by calling 672-2240. The appointments are free courtesy of AARP Foundation Tax Aide and begin Feb. 2.

Sheridan Senior Center
"Celebrating 40 Years of Service!"
 www.sheridanseniorcenter.org

FUN & FOOD

BUILD YOUR OWN SALAD MON-FRI
 Entrees and kiosk include sides, dessert and drink.

Entrée Choice*	or	Soup / Salad Bar
Sun - Glazed Ham		
Mon - Turkey Tetrazzini		Beef Stew
Tue - Spaghetti w/Meat Sauce		Butternut Bisque
Wed - Baked Potato Bar /Chili or Ham & Cheese Sauce		Mexican Chicken
Thu - Oven Fried Chicken		Creamy Fish Chowder
Fri - Beef Stew		Build Your Own Salad
Sat - Turkey Fillet		

***Home Delivered Meals**

Tue - Legislative Luncheon	12:00 p.m.- 1:30 p.m.	Community Room
Wed - Bob Ross Painting Class**	1:00 p.m.- 3:30 p.m.	Art Studio
Thu - Beginner's Crochet Class**	12:00 p.m.- 1:30 p.m.	Art Studio
Fri - Chair Massages**	30 minute Appointments	Lobby
Sat - Skin Care Party**	10:00 a.m.	Community Room

** advance sign-up required by calling 672-2240. Fees may apply to some classes so please ask.

Lunch Service Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m., 7 days a week
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Protect yourself from fraud: File with the IRS

BY LOIS BELL
SHERIDAN SENIOR CENTER

SHERIDAN — The IRS and AARP Foundation tax aide volunteers are encouraging everyone to file a tax return for 2015 regardless if they don't meet the filing requirements.

Why? "It's part of the IRS campaign to try to protect us from fraud," said Janet Dill. Dill has been preparing tax forms for AARP Foundation's Tax Aid program for nine years and is the Sheridan area coordinator.

So how does filing a tax return protect your identity from fraud?

"If someone has used your identity number — such as your Social Security number — to claim a refund, the IRS is then alerted. The IRS will then contact both parties who have filed under the same identification number by mail," said Dill. "Most likely the party who filed fraudulently will not respond. Once they work through the situation, the innocent party will be fine."

You won't know if your social security number is being used until you file. If someone has your Social Security

number, your credit history and other financial profile could be compromised.

"I've personally seen two returns in Sheridan where fraud was involved," Dill said.

The IRS has sent out letters to individuals in Sheridan who have been victims of the misuse of their Social Security number. These letters will provide victims with a new identifier number for them to use on future tax filings.

"Note that the letter is incorrectly dated 2014 but it is legitimate," said Dill at a community presentation at the local AARP Chapter meeting on Jan. 8.

The AARP Foundation Tax Aide program prepares tax returns for individuals at no charge. The program is staffed by volunteers. Free tax preparation through this program is available on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the Sheridan Senior Center located at 211 Smith St. Advance appointment is required by calling the Senior Center.

Another tip to ward off fraud? File as early as you can. Appointments are being taken now for free tax preparation beginning Feb. 2 at the Sheridan Senior Center. You can call 672-2240 Mondays through Fridays to make an appointment.