

A life dedicated to advocating for older adults

BY LOIS BELL
SHERIDAN SENIOR CENTER

SHERIDAN — The foundation for his path in advocating for elders began when he was a young boy.

“My parents had always drilled in my head respect for elders,” said Tim Summers, the youngest of six siblings.

“We did a lot of service through our church,” Summers said. “We would do yard work, taking meals to elders, and stopping by to make sure elders were taken care of. There were three centenarians in my neighborhood and I really learned to love and respect elders through them.”

While a graduate student at the University of Utah, Summers was thinking of a career in hospital administration.

“One of my advisors invited me to meet with AARP’s area director,” Summers said. “The next thing I know, I was working for AARP.”

Summers, a young father, began working for the organization while in his last semester of graduate school. He wasn’t old enough to be a member but he could be an advocate. He was assigned to providing support, research, information, and testimony to volunteer

AARP lobbyists in seven states. One of his first assignments was research on background checks for employees in nursing homes.

“There was an abuse case in North Dakota that caught national attention,” Summers said. “I researched what the current laws were.”

Summers found that some states had what he calls “bits and pieces” of laws, but most states at that time did not require background checks for nursing home employees. Little by little, most states passed background check laws. Only three states, including Wyoming, do not require background checks.

“There are now some federal guidelines that require general background checks,” Summers said.

While at the AARP Southwest Regional Office in Dallas in the late 1990s, Summers worked in several states to get Medicaid to cover home and community based services. Community based services support older adults living independently in their homes at a fraction of the cost of nursing home care.

“That was a lot of fun because you were making a difference,” Summers said. “Legislators, the media,

and the community ‘got it.’ Everyone realized that people prefer to be in their homes.”

When a position opened up in Cheyenne, Summers jumped on the chance to apply. He was hired.

“It was a lateral move supporting regional teams. I was lucky to get Wyoming,” said Summers, who moved into the position of state advocacy director. Later, his position expanded to take on the duties of the state director, providing oversight to the overall programs and agenda of AARP. Summers has now been with the organization for 20 years.

In addition to his parents, Summers credits another source for influencing his path.

“The community, oh my goodness,” Summers said of his youth. “You’ve heard me talk about disrupt aging. They were disrupting aging in my neighborhood long before. We had (elder) adults shoveling each other’s walks and out haying well into their 80s. That’s when I really got my respect for elders.”

Summers also honors older adults who find ways to contribute despite health challenges.

“That takes me to a woman who was quadriplegic but whose memory was amazing,” Summers said. “School groups would visit her and she could tell these amazing stories. She found



COURTESY PHOTO |

Tim Summers has spent his life advocating for the betterment of older adults. He attributes his respect for elders to the values of his parents and the elders who lived in his community during his youth.

her way to disrupt aging. There are ways to contribute that don’t involve physical health.”

After 14 years in Wyoming, Summers moved to Helena, Montana, last year to become the AARP Montana state director as well. What does Summers feel is his greatest legacy for the Equality State? Summers lists two.

“The establishment of the Office for the Consumer Advocate in 2003,” Summers said, referring to the efforts to establish a utility watchdog organization for the

interests of residential consumers who cannot afford to hire an attorney to contest rate hikes.

The second accomplishment? Legislative funding for state senior centers.

“That took a lot of work,” Summers said. “I worked with Carmen Rideout and others.”

Rideout is the Sheridan Senior Center’s executive director. Their efforts and the efforts of others led to the creation of the Wyoming Senior Services Board creating a stable and consistent funding source for

senior centers throughout Wyoming.

“I feel so privileged to have lived and worked in Wyoming for AARP,” Summers said. “I have been able to get to know so many amazing and dedicated volunteers and seniors who have made such a difference in the lives of Wyoming’s 50-plus population. They truly have ‘disrupted’ or changed the way we think about aging.”

Summers has caused some disruption himself by affecting change for the betterment of older adults.

CENTER STAGE |

A new twist to appreciating volunteers

At the Senior Center, we can’t do what we do without volunteers. For years, every year we celebrated volunteers at an annual volunteer breakfast held during National Volunteer Week in April. We even had a volunteer appreciation dinner during the summer in Whitney Commons.

As we evolve with 600 volunteers, we are thinking about new ways to celebrate them 365 days of the year, not just one time of the year. Six hundred volunteers seem like a lot but we need everyone!

We recently had a pizza party for our Green Boomerang Thrift Shop volunteers. We took them off-site in a fun environment at a local pizza restaurant to recognize them. They got star pins and fun certificates we made for each one. They liked it.

Our next volunteer event will be a summer social where volunteers will be encouraged to bring someone who

is interested in volunteering at the Senior Center. Their name will be entered in a drawing for a prize at the social for each potential volunteer they bring.

Volunteers are being recognized by each program they volunteer in with the hopes of making appreciation more personal to them. This is different than the one big party we had in the past. We are making appreciation year-round.

I think volunteers should be appreciated year-round, not just once a year. I’ve been inspired by an article that I read in the Journal of Extension from June 2010. It offered a model written for 4-H Extension agents and volunteer administrators about how to recognize volunteers. I like it and want to implement it.

Another benefit to the year-round volunteer appreciation events is that the gathering offers a smaller group where program directors can meet and thank volunteers in a more personal environment.

Like all nonprofits, we always have need for volunteers. We want to be flexible and work with volunteers’ schedules and provide them an enriching and fulfilling experience. And, unfortunately, as much as we love our volunteers, some move on.

We always have the need for volunteers delivering meals to home bound elders, at our thrift shop, during the lunch hour helping with carrying trays, pouring beverages and at the dining room desk. We need volunteers at our satellite meal sites. For example, at Heritage Towers, the Senior Center serves lunch in the dining room downstairs but we also need volunteers to take lunches to homebound residents. Volunteers that support our lunch program qualify for a complimentary lunch being served that day.

Socialization is important for everyone at every age! We need senior companions to visit with elders. For qualifying volunteers, there may be a stipend and mileage for senior companions.

We love our volunteer instructors who teach crafts, the arts, writing, exercise classes, clowning classes — just sharing their gifts and interests. These volunteers enrich all of us.

It doesn’t have to be long-term volunteering: Sometimes 45 minutes once a week can make the world of difference to someone else. Who wouldn’t want to be part of that?

So, we at the Senior Center love thanking our volunteers who make a world of difference in the lives of others. It’s a small price tag for us with leveraged great results for others.

So, look for changes in how we thank our volunteers at the Senior Center. We want to let them know all year long how much they are valued and valuable.

HALEY ROUGEAU is the director of volunteer services at the Sheridan 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.

SENIOR CENTER HAPPENINGS |

- The Senior Center will be operating under holiday hours 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. in observance of July 4. Lunch will be served that day during its usual hours 11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.
- There is limited bus service on Monday, July

4. Please call Goose Creek Transit at 675-RIDE (7433) as soon as you know your travel needs on July 4.

- Myths About Medicare and Long-Term Care presentation, Tuesday, July 5, 5:30 p.m. at the Sheridan Senior Center.

4th of July

Sheridan Senior Center
“Celebrating 40 Years of Service!”

www.sheridanseniorcenter.org

Fun and Food

BUILD YOUR OWN SALAD MON- FRI

Entrees and kiosk include sides, dessert and drink.

Entrée Choice*	or	Soup Kiosk
Sun – Chicken Fried Steak		
Mon – BBQ Pork Sandwich		July 4 No Salad Bar
Tue – Taco Salad		Pawtucket Chicken Soup
Wed – Turkey Fillet		Ham & Bean Soup
Thu – Spaghetti w/Meat Sauce		Chicken Vegetable
Fri – Pork Chop/Gravy		Creamy Mushroom Soup
Sat – Chicken Enchilada w/ Salsa		

***Home Delivered Meals**

Mon - JULY 4	Senior Center Holiday Hours	8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
	Lunch served	11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.

Tue - “Myths about Medicare and Long-Term Care” a free community presentation through the Senior Center’s “When I’m 64...or more” life planning lecture series, 5:30 p.m., Dining Room

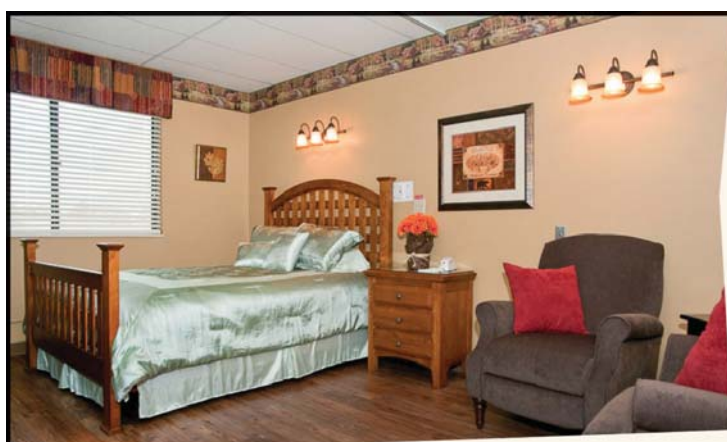
Wed - Basic A. M. Moves 9:30 a.m., Community Room

Thu - Knitting with Donna fee 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Art Studio

Sat - “Mm...Mm Breakfast” Omelet made in front of you 7:30 a.m.- 9:30 a.m. Dining Room

Lunch Service Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.,
7 days a week 211 Smith Street Sheridan, WY 82801
Home Delivered Meals – call by 10 a.m. (307) 672-6079

HALEY ROUGEAU



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