

SENIORS

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Delivering loving déjà vu

BY LOIS BELL
SHERIDAN SENIOR CENTER

SHERIDAN — It was a déjà vu moment for the Giavotis family. But for mother Ann it was an especially magical moment; she just did not know such a moment was coming when she woke that morning.

"Get out of your pajamas, we're coming to get you," Ann Giavotis' son, John Giavotis, said on the phone. Giavotis took his mother to Java Moon to meet up with his wife, Dana, and siblings, Rosie and Mike. The Giavotis family enjoyed its gatherings at the coffee house. This morning, some special friends from the Senior Center family caregiver services program also joined the family.

The Giavotis children had been planning to make this morning extra special for their mom. She was feeling the limitations of having voluntarily given up her driver's license.

She had become too weak to walk from her car to the store to shop. She shared her decision to give up her keys with her family. In time, she began to talk about an electric scooter. Her children began the conversation among themselves.

"Even if she had a scooter for only one summer, let's get her one," Dana Giavotis said.

The Giavotis siblings immediately thought of the Senior Center's loan closet; they had gotten other items for their mom from there.

The group gathered at a table looking toward Main Street. Ann Giavotis looked out the window of the coffee shop. There was an electric wheelchair parked in front decorated with prayer flags. A large red apple sat on the seat.

"See that buggy right there, that's exactly what I want for my freedom," Ann Giavotis said. "I still didn't get it."

The rest of the group was anxiously waiting for her to notice it and say something. The moment had come.

John Giavotis handed their mother a set of prop keys to the electric wheelchair. The group revealed their secret.

"I got hysterical, what a surprise," Ann Giavotis said.

"It was such an 'Aha' moment," Jan Quinn said. "It was such fun to see such family support and the enthusiasm for their mom."

Quinn works in the Senior Center's family caregiver program and had been in on the surprise from the moment the family called.

Ann Giavotis rode the wheelchair to her home blocks away while her children walked by her side.

This was not the first time her children had rallied for wheels for their mother. The four siblings — John, Mike, Rosie and Georgia, plus John's wife, Dana — had surprised their mother seven years earlier with another set of wheels.

Ann Giavotis had always wanted a yellow MINI Cooper. The siblings gathered and found one for their mother. They parked the MINI Cooper on Main Street in front of Java Moon and gathered the group to go out for coffee.

Ann Giavotis and her family sat at the same table at Java Moon. She spied a yellow MINI Cooper parked on Main Street.

"See that yellow car right there," she said. "That's what I want. I would like to have one of those."

Next thing she knew, Ann Giavotis had the keys in hand and went for a ride in the surrounding countryside. She enjoyed her new Cooper with the license plate APPLE for years.

When Ann Giavotis received her scooter, it was déjà vu; the experience when she received a car was recreated.



COURTESY PHOTO

Ann Giavotis was surprised when her family gifted her with an electric scooter organized in partnership with the Senior Center. This was the second time her children surprised her with wheels and staged the presentation in the same manner as their gift seven years ago.

Today, Ann Giavotis uses her electric wheelchair to visit nearby Kendrick Park to watch children in the municipal pool or

to observe the birds.

"Every aging parent should have fun times like that," Ann Giavotis said.

The time is here and now

This week will simply be over-the-top exciting for the people who have an interest in the Sheridan Senior Center. Our grand opening is on Wednesday. It will include a ribbon cutting event at 10 a.m.

with tours of our new space, at 211 Smith St., starting at 10:30 a.m. and additional tours continuing throughout the day. We will also be unveiling our new name and logo.

A new name? Since 2000 when I first began my job here, the topic of senior centers rebranding themselves has been on the agenda of every national conference I have attended and even those I have not. It has also been the focus of a number of Wyoming conferences and trainings in order to inspire us, those who work with older people, to stay up to date and current in marketing our purpose and value. They warned that many senior centers are becoming tired and

obsolete because they are not keeping up with the way people want "to do and be" as they get older. Senior centers across the country are changing what they offer, and this often includes changing their image and brand. Even more importantly, people in Sheridan have encouraged us to think about a name change. Some have said "leave it alone" while others have said "please change it!" The grand opening of our newly renovated and modern space seemed like the right time to also renovate and modernize our brand. It really is not so much a name change, as it is a naming of our senior center.



**CARMEN
RIDEOUT**

A grand opening

The community is invited to the grand opening of the Sheridan Senior Center on Wednesday at 10 a.m.

Guided tours of the new facility follow introductory speeches outside of the lobby doors on the east side of the building at 211 Smith St.

will result in more people getting the help or connection they need.

Senior centers are nationally recognized as organizations that receive federal, state and local funding to provide community based services to "seniors." The 11,400 senior centers across the country provide a wide array of programs, activities and support for people to stay well and engaged in their communities. The 40 Wyoming senior centers come in a multitude of shapes and sizes, and with a wide variety of names. My favorite name in Wyoming is Pinedale's senior center, Rendezvous Pointe. The name is ageless and creates an image of people coming together.

The name we chose is based on input from the people we serve, community members, employees and volunteers. The board of directors made the final selection this past spring. All I can share for now is that the name is fresh and upbeat. It reflects what we are for many people in Sheridan. It is ageless and welcomes all generations to be part of what we do. It reflects our updated and modern space and I'm hoping people find it fun and exciting.

Our mission remains steadfast, "To celebrate, embrace and serve older adults for the betterment of our community." In order to do this we need to serve all generations. Whether it is offering a place to eat, a place to volunteer and work, or get connected to a program, we want people of all ages and walks of life to come through our doors. We are so grateful to this community and looking forward to serving it for many years to come!



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GUEST COLUMNIST CARMEN RIDEOUT
is the executive director of 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.