

Exeter Senior Center open house By Leesa K. Bartul

Nestled between the fire hall and the old tag factory stands a statement of the determination of the senior citizens in Exeter.

In a town of just 700, Exeter has a rare and what most consider a precious commodity, a senior center. This week it celebrated 10 years of serving the community with an Open House on Sunday afternoon.

First organized in 1969, the Exeter senior citizens eventually started to call themselves the "Golden Agers." They met once a month in the fire hall or the parish hall for a meeting and a potluck. But according to Doris Hall, who served as president of the club, there was one member who had a vision for more than just a monthly meeting.

"Frank Rouch was the instigator, he really pushed for us to have a place to meet for seniors in town and to enjoy ourselves," Hall explained at the Open House.

Nancy Kohler, who served as the Fillmore County Senior Advisor for a number of years recalled Rouch's determination, "When he first started talking about it (the building project) he said we needed to keep it going, keep the effort going and they really did."

In 1994 the group decided that a senior center was their goal and the fund raising began. Starting with a \$5,000.00 donation from John and Ruth Veon, the Golden Agers began adding to their building fund. Over 300 individuals, businesses and organizations along with a Peter Kiewit Challenge Grant and a Fillmore County Foundation grant, donated to the Senior Center Building Fund to help meet their goal in 1998. Jerome Ekeler donated the land.

The Exeter Village Board was also a key factor in the vision, "Wayne Moore who served on the Village Board at the time was very helpful in getting things organized for us. He served as kind of a liaison from the city working with Frank (Rouch) and Ted (Larsen) to keep things moving smoothly." said Elva McBride. Harre Construction had the building ready for a May 3, 1998 Open House.

In addition to Rouch, Doris Hall, Elva McBride, Chris Willms, Frances Michl and Ted Larsen served as the Senior Center Building Committee members. So many names, living and deceased, were mentioned as volunteers working with the Golden Agers and the Senior Center. Martin and Hazel Thomsen, Bernie Larsen, George Barker, Henrietta Harre, Rose Franzen, Gerald and Margaret Becker, Stephen Songster, Shirley Thomsen, Tess Moor, Reverend Bob Brauning are some of those.

It wasn't long after the center was finished that it was paid for, and the group immediately gave it away. "We deeded it over to the city so it could be a Community Senior Center," said Hall. "There are so many people in town who could use the senior center that don't. I guess they don't know what they are missing. We can always use more volunteers, too."

Currently, the Village takes care of the insurance and the utilities for the building, while the donations the Center collects pay for the phone bill, cleaning and repairs.

Fillmore County Senior Advisor Brenda Motis thanked everyone for coming to the Open House, "This is a unique senior center. It is run strictly by volunteers. That says a lot about the Exeter community and the people who come here."

Some of those volunteers, who currently serve on the advisory board, are Bernie Larsen, Sharon Dyer, LaVonne Guthrie, Darleene Becker, Annie Mueller and Evelyn Michl.