

"ANYTHING TWO PEOPLE KNOW IS NOT A SECRET."

THE LEGENDARY CHEYENNE HERALD

the local advocacy journal

June 17, 2008 ♦ Issue No. 149 ♦ Next issue July 1, 2008

Cheyenne Housing Authority to seniors: Let 'em go hungry!

The call came at about 10:30 on Wednesday morning. The caller, familiar to me from another issue for which she had served as activist and brought to a satisfactory resolution, left a message and I returned it as soon as I listened to it.

I knew if she wanted to share "a problem" with me, it would be legitimate and worth investigating. She has credibility with me.

She told me that the senior center she and her neighbors count on for a hot lunch each weekday had been closed for some long overdue repairs to the kitchen floor but it had been closed without notice to those seniors who count on the lunches and look forward to the social aspect of each day's gathering, as well as the lunch.

I asked if regulars were still showing up each closed day for lunch - she said there was no signage about when the place would reopen - she told me they were.

She and others I spoke with later that same day subsequently told me that such disrespect and insensitivity to their needs and limitations are not uncommon.

I traveled to the senior center to await some who would come, only to be turned away because the place was closed.

If it had not been for this valuable volunteer, vehicles would have unloaded and one or more elderly person would have gone to the front door only to find the place was not going to serve lunch and there was no notice as to when they could expect it to reopen for their lunches.

The activist, who almost accidentally made me aware that she herself is over 70 years of age, waited in her car, in the strong wind, and got out each time a vehicle or neighborhood pedestrian approached to tell them what she knew. That was that a guy was working on the kitchen floor and the stove and other kitchen items had been removed and that there would be no lunch on this day.

No one, including two women who serve as "cooks" at the center, were notified that the place would not be open. Not Monday and not Tuesday. They each journeyed from distant homes, one by public bus, only to learn that their services would not be needed that day. The absolute lack of consideration for not only the seniors

who take their lunch there daily but even the two employees who work there was stark, shocking and disgusting.

No coordination had been attempted between the worker and the cooks who have keys. On Tuesday morning, when the worker left for awhile, the cook, who was not informed as to what was taking place, took the precaution of locking the front door when she left after finding the place in a shambles and no one inside. When the worker returned later, he could not re-enter because his boss had the key.

When the worker left on Wednesday to get some lunch himself, he verified with the volunteer I was sitting with in her car that the door would not be locked upon his return. This activist does not have a key and he was safe.

In addition to the unconscionable actions of these several days involving lunches for those most in need of the nutrition and unable to provide it for themselves in some cases, no resident of the area has a key so they can open or use the facility for social gatherings such as card games or just visiting with others of their same age and interests. It is off limits.

I waited with the woman for 45 minutes.

In that time, even though it was the third straight day the center was unavailable for lunch, eleven vehicles arrived, with about 15 passengers in total. With the good humor and patience gained from a lifetime of facing hurdles like this one when it comes to government being involved in their lives, each took the news stoically. One nearby resident walked over. She was bundled for the strong winds and low temperatures for this June day. She had experience in facilities of this type and her comments were not kind about the operation of this one.

I almost had to shove her toward her home to get in out of the cold wind. She, like many who come to these lunches, enjoy conversation and company - even with a stranger like me.

I spoke with occupants of some of the vehicles. I asked what they would do now - with the center closed and no lunch available here again this day. One woman said, "he's driving" and I looked to "him." He said, "IHOP, we'll go to IHOP."

All do not come because of the \$3.00 cost of the lunches. The menu for this week which is shown below may remind readers of their elementary school days. As often as not, the fare is not to rave about. But it is hot, or at least warm, and friends are there. Where else can you find pickled beets twice in a five-day span?

I spoke with some of the people about others who often come to have lunch at the facility. They described residents who use canes, walkers and even a wheelchair to get there. Or have to be driven.

No one downtown thought it important enough to notify these residents that the lunches would not be available. It is obvious that no one downtown even knew how long the senior center kitchen might be out of operation. Worse, no one cared.

The United States of America is probably the worst country in the world for its treatment of its seniors - our elders. In other countries, they are revered. Here, they are often ignored, neglected and abused.

A cook placed a note on the door.

CLOSED FOR REPAIR OF FLOOR MON - TUE DOWNTOWN OPEN LUNCH SERVED 11:30 - 1:30

It was **Wednesday** when I was there.

I went back on Friday. The repairs still weren't done and lunch wasn't available.

CHA didn't put up the note. They didn't mail a notice in advance. They didn't visit

the 55 residences of Phase I to tell the seniors they wouldn't be able to take lunch where many were used to going. They didn't call residents with the news. They didn't leave a note on their doors.

They made no effort whatsoever to tell anybody anything. To hell with them, they're only senior citizens, they thought.

Those downtown, paid well and protected from complaints of these residents by not answering their phones or returning messages, did nothing to try to make life easier for these seniors while the kitchen floor was being repaired.

There was a time when Jack Spiker would have raised hell about this cavalier treatment of our senior citizens. Of nine on the city council, residents call the Cheyenne Herald rather than any of them because they don't believe care would be shown nor help offered from the electeds.

How hard would it have been to notify those who come to lunch there (they have to register each day when they eat lunch and pay their money) that they should go to Burke or one of the other two senior centers for a specified duration until the floor was repaired, the stove reassembled and the kitchen once again in operation?

How hard would it have been to notify those who come to lunch there that a bus would be provided to leave that center at 11:45 and return at 1:30 to accommodate those who do not, cannot afford to with gas at \$4 a gallon, or should not, drive?

None of this was hard. None of it is rocket science or brain surgery. But it takes people who care. People who care more than when is payday, how much vacation do I get, when can I use my sick days, and what is my health insurance premium.

One day, these uncaring people will be seniors. And, it is a truth: What goes 'round, comes 'round. Prepare thyself.

| NONE OF THESE JUNE MEALS WERE PROVIDED IN SPITE OF BEING POSTED ON THE DOOR OF THAT SENIOR CENTER | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| 9 Pork chops Mashed potatoes/ gravy Spinach Tossed salad WW bread Cranberry orange bar | 10 Baked chicken Dressing/gravy Squash Pickled beets WW bread Fruit cocktail Ice cream | 11 Swiss steak w/ tomatoes & onions Mashed potatoes Peas Relish tray Peaches in orange Jell-o w/whip cream | 12 Baked fish Whole potatoes Zucchini & tomatoes Pickled beets WW bread Tropical fruit | 13 Hungarian goulash Corn O'Brien Applesauce Oatmeal muffin Mandarin oranges in red Jell-o |

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