

ASHLAND DAILY TIDINGS

Opinion

Guest Opinion: Are these Ashland values?

By Sue Wilson

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Ashland Parks Director Michael Black alleged that the Ashland Senior Center was operating as a “club” for a small group of people. What a mean-spirited thing to say.

The senior participants found companionship in the caring, supporting environment that they trusted and some considered it as “family.”

The high percentage of Ashland seniors over age 80 and unusually high percentage of moderate- to high-risk seniors who regularly attended senior center activities had nowhere they felt as comfortable.

As a food program volunteer I experienced this when I saw:

- An elder senior regularly brought in his spouse in a wheelchair and helped feed her — and the other seniors accepted them with open arms and, yes, with love.
- Elder veterans sharing experiences with old photos and documents.
- The quiet and then sometimes lively conversations about life.
- Sharing of personal difficulties and others caring and providing input.
- The close attention staff had for the elders who were most fragile.
- A senior center staff member, who was an elder senior herself, visit each senior to see how they were doing and make sure they had their critical needs met. She also introduced seniors

new to the center and connected them with people she felt they would like.

To create this caring and trusting environment, the staff had to be compassionate for sure. Yet they also needed to be experts in senior social services, especially case management, in order to properly identify and address when it was appropriate to intervene and how. They used their bare-bones budget to help and protect Ashland's most vulnerable seniors.

Now APRC is reorganizing the senior center. They have demonstrated that they do not value local social services and have given every indication that they will outsource it to a regional agency where seniors will have to access it through telephone, internet and/or with the assistance of low-level senior center personnel. The ad hoc senior advisory committee has paved the way for this change.

Commissioners have stated that they want to bring in younger, more active seniors who can pay higher fees for services, and have downplayed the needs of the elder seniors. That is, APRC is shifting their resources to provide more services to those who do not need it from those who have nowhere else to go.

Is this consistent with the values in the Ashland community?

— *Sue Wilson lives in Ashland.*



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