

Longtime Newberg resident senior center's 'mascot'

■ *Ninety-year-old volunteer Dee Norman is heart and soul of facility*

By MEGAN STEWART
Pamplin Media Group

If you have ever frequented the Chehalem Senior Center, there is a good chance that you have met 90-year-old volunteer Dee Norman.

Possessing an agility and sure-footed confidence unusual for her age, Norman appears to be everywhere at once, never without something to do for the center and its occupants.

Whether she's picking up donated bread at a local grocery store, flitting from table to table to chat with fellow seniors or leading a game of dominos, there's little doubt that Norman is one of the center's most dedicated volunteers.

In the eyes of senior programming specialist Sarah Larison, however, Norman is much more than that — she's essentially the senior center's mascot.

"It's just Dee's place," Larison said. "You don't think of the senior center without thinking about Dee and I think everyone knows that ... She's a fixture of the senior center. She's part of the landscape."

While Norman said she only volunteers three days a week with an occasional extra visit if more hands are needed, Larison asserted that she sees Norman almost daily.

"I see her pretty much every day, even if she's just stopping in for something," Larison said. "I feel like we're her second home, maybe her first home. She just loves it so much that she's really taken ownership of it ..."

Larison said that Norman, who has volunteered there for 10 years, wears many hats at the senior center and will take on any miscellaneous project that hasn't been completed.

"If something isn't getting done, she goes all the way to the (Chehalem Park and Recreation District) administra-



Ninety-year-old Dee Norman's duties at the Chehalem Senior Center range from picking up donated bread from a local grocery store to organizing the facility's extensive game collection.

PMG PHOTO: GARY ALLEN

Larison said. "Whatever she needs, she makes sure it gets done. She doesn't wait for anybody."

Norman's primary responsibility involves matching anyone who walks into the senior center with an activity that interests them.

A charismatic person, "she is very good at talking people into joining a group," Larison said.

Norman is also the senior center's lead dominos volunteer and keeps the 12 participants "in line," Larison said.

"She's assertive but extremely kind," Larison said. "And if somebody needs something, she's going to make sure they have their needs met."

Larison also noted that Norman is "just buddies with everybody" and that "she'll make a point of welcoming somebody, of showing them around, talking to them, making them feel welcome."

But Norman, Larison said, is far too humble to ever bring the spotlight onto herself.

"I'm not used to tooting my own horn, you know," Norman said.

The one compliment Norman paid herself was that she is a people person.

"I don't judge people," Norman said. "That's really important, you know. I don't talk

for that. I think as we get older, that's one of our traits, you know, is to talk and try to be a little bit better than the other guy."

Since volunteering at the senior center, "I've learned to accept people for what they are, what they enjoy doing," Norman said. "You can't push them to do other things. You have to be patient and understanding. I know you can't be bossy — I found that out."

Norman said she and the other volunteers do their best to make senior center visitors feel comfortable and welcome.

"I'm sure we don't do everything right all the time, but we sure try," she said.

Unsurprisingly, working with people is her favorite part of volunteering at the senior center.

Norman said it brings her joy and fulfillment "to see

their lives get better" and "see them be more comfortable around everybody."

Volunteering also gives her a glimpse into people's lives.

Norman spoke extensively about Jane Boggess, a senior center regular who died in March at 100 years old, and various experiences she had with her. She recalled how the woman continued to attend hula lessons even after she became confined to her wheelchair, and the beautiful relationship Boggess had with her boyfriend who passed a few years before she did.

Norman herself has lived in Newberg for 40 years. Prior to moving here, she and her husband ran a grocery store in Aloha, "with the gas pumps and the whole kit and kaboodle," Norman said. They raised their five children in a two-story house next door to

their business.

Since her husband of 65 years died 13 years ago from a heart attack, she lives alone in the house they bought together, located less than 10 minutes from the senior center.

In addition to her own kids, she has 10 grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren and 1 great-great-child, with two more on the way this summer.

Before she started volunteering at the senior center, Norman helped at Newberg FISH for 15 years. She also previously volunteered as a state ombudsman across four counties, advocating for long-term residents in licensed care facilities.

Norman said she comes by her love for volunteering naturally, helping

others ever since she was a kid.

If anyone had an influence on her love for volunteering, however, it was her grandmother who migrated to Oregon by covered wagon. Norman's grandmother volunteered at the USO (United Services Organizations), a non-profit that provides entertain-

ment for military personnel, and served as midwife until a hospital was built in her community.

"I feel like that's what you should do, is give, not take all the time ...," Norman said, adding "(volunteering) it's good

for me" and "gets me out of the house, meeting people."

Norman has no plans to stop volunteering anytime soon.

"How about (in) 20 years?" Norman said. "I have no idea."

And she has no intention of leaving the senior center either.

"I'm staying here," Norman said, who regards fellow volunteers and visitors as family. "A lot of good goes on here. And I'm comfortable here."

"I think she is the type of person who can't sit still," Larison said. "She's focusing her energy for good. Like I said, she just doesn't stop. She just go, go, goes. And she found a place that can use that energy, and that's where she puts it. I would have liked to see her in her younger days."

"You don't think of the senior center without thinking about Dee and I think everyone knows that ... She's a fixture of the senior center. She's part of the landscape."

— Sara Larison, senior programming specialist

MOLALLA SANITARY Services, Inc.

Post Office Box 1808 ■ Oregon City, OR 97045
503-829-6183
molallasanitaryservice.com

Canby Disposal Co.
CONTAINERS - DROP BOXES
503-2663900
Serving Canby, Bartow, New Era and Macksburg Areas
1600 SE 4th Ave.

HEM OVERHEAD DOORS, INC.
RESIDENTIAL / COMMERCIAL
MARK WEISSENBRUNNER / OWNER
Phone: 503.829.8814
Cell: 503.720.1858
P.O. Box 1065
Molalla, OR 97038

- Garage Doors
- Steel & Wood
- Garage Door Operators
- All Repairs/ Broken Springs