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Seniors Swing Meal Deal With Deer Ridge

Local seniors take over meal program, prison inmates cooking the food.

By [Susan Matheny](#)

The Seniors of Jefferson County took a bold step and decided to run their own senior meals program after complaints about the food quality.

As a cost-saving move, about 1 1/2 years ago, the Central Oregon Council on Aging, which has coordinated senior meal sites throughout the region for years, closed down local kitchens and began cooking all the food at a central kitchen in Redmond.

In the beginning, the food was shuttled to Madras the same day it was served (Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday), but then things changed, according to Dick Montee, president of Seniors of Jefferson County.

"On Tuesday, they started bringing up food for the week and having us put it in the cooler. Then on meal days, we'd heat it up in convection ovens," Montee said, noting it was like eating leftovers instead of fresh-cooked meals.



Photo By Susan Matheny
Frank Lake, left, Brenda Rowe, and Louise Muir dish up desserts and salads for the meal.



Photo By Susan Matheny
Dick Montee, left, and Richard



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Ladeby, prison food services manager, unload the hot entrees, while volunteer Jeanne Linn gets the salads and desserts.

People complained about the food and meal attendance began dwindling at the Madras senior center.

Then Madras residents Mari and Russ Wymore, who serve on the citizen's review committee for Deer Ridge Correctional Facility near Madras, came up with an idea.

The prison has a huge cooking facility that turns out meals for 600 inmates three times a day. Why not see if the seniors could contract to have the prison prepare the meals?

The Wymores and seniors met with Deer Ridge community development coordinator Parrish Van Wert, who thought it would be a great way for the prison to get involved with the community.

The prison's kitchen is staffed with inmates, who learn vocational skills on the job, but this would add another dimension.

"The inmates want to give back to society," Van Wert pointed out.

It took some time to clear the idea with the state, since this was a new move. "There is another prison that bakes bread for a school district, but to our knowledge, we're the first one in Oregon supplying food to a senior center," Van Wert said.

Because the prison has a dietitian on staff, the senior meals are also nutritionally balanced to meet specifications for the federally-funded senior meals program.

Once Richard Ladeby, prison food services manager, got the OK, meal deliveries began Tuesday, March 3, with a record crowd of some 60 seniors showing up to sample the new food, and 50 showing up on Wednesday.

Menu entrees last week included baked ham, spaghetti, and meat loaf, with a hot vegetable, bread, salad and dessert also served each meal.

Montee picks the food up in insulated containers in the morning and delivers it to the senior center by 11:15 a.m. "The meals are hot and fresh and ready to serve, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday," he said. For now, he is using a covered pickup, but is looking for a van to haul the food.

Senior volunteers dish up desserts and salads and serve the hot food cafeteria style, as the other seniors get in line to fill their plates.

Three seniors who attended meals before and after the transition gave the new food a thumbs up.

"The meals are bigger and well-prepared. Before, sometimes the food was dry," said Doris Ridenour.

Darlene Skeels, who attends meals regularly with her husband Dan,



Photo By Susan Matheny
Spaghetti, garlic bread and green beans were on the menu last Wednesday.

said, "This is great. There's so much food and it's nice. It was dried out food before."

Bill Apgar was impressed with a homemade soup the prison cooks threw in as an extra bonus on Tuesday.

"It was soup with homemade noodles. They're outstanding cooks, you can tell by the food. Everybody is much happier with this," Apgar said, adding, "And if there are any problems, through Parrish (Van Wert) they can respond directly."

Montee said for the next month or two, COCOA will continue to provide the Meals On Wheels, which served around 20 homebound people in Jefferson County.

"Eventually, we hope to take over Meals On Wheels. Then we would get the pass-through money from COCOA from the federal Older Americans Act (to fund the meals)," Montee said.

Seniors are asked for a donation of \$3.50 per meal, but meals are free if they can't afford it, he noted, inviting more Jefferson County seniors to come sample the new meals.

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Inventors get busy

By Casey Clark Ney
Argus Observer

Fruitland “ It all began with two friends and one big idea.

Fruitland residents and business owners Shawna Pierson and Chris Kodama were on a weekend getaway when they realized a need for a functional and stylish reusable shopping bag system.

According to the duo, they decided to develop a product that would not only save the planet, but do it in style.

“That is how it started,” Kodama said.

The day was Aug. 17, 2007, which both ladies claim as the founding day of their company, iTySE.

Shortly after their weekend vacation, Kodama and Pierson began working on their first prototype. Kodama was charged with seamstress duties, while Pierson utilized her skills in design. They also organized a market research group, and before long they were well on their way.

When building the prototype, the women said their main focus was creating a reusable bag that was durable, washable and flexible. They determined the best material for the job was a mesh fabric.

“This made the bags expandable,” Pierson explained, adding that the second step was to design a carrying case to hold the shopping bags.

The end product resulted in two items “ the iTySE and the iTySE BiTySE. The iTySe is a handbag designed to hold several reusable shopping bags along with the traditional items found in a purse, Pierson said. The iTySE BiTySE is a smaller carrying case that conceals the shopping bag system, making it ideal for men or women who don’t want to forgo their purses.

In addition to the shopping system, Pierson and Kodama created a rip-stop reusable bag. The bag is black and designed for privacy.

“Sometimes you need a bag that is discreet,” Pierson said.

While the duo was concerned with making their shopping system both stylish and “green,” they also focused on durability.

“If you invest in our system, it’s good for at least two years,” Kodama said. “We are thinking this is a long- term investment.”



Shawna Pierson and Chris Kodama work on a display at Red Apple. The Fruitland duo recently launched a reusable shopping bag company “ iTySE “ they hope will encourage people to stop using plastic bags.

With a product in hand, Kodama and Pierson were tasked with finding a manufacturer.

The duo soon discovered Oregon Corrections Enterprises. OCE is an organization of work programs in eight of the state's correctional institutions. Approximately 1,140 inmates work for OCE. The primary objective of the organization is to provide its workers with the attitudes and skills needed to secure employment upon their release.

According to Pierson, the inmates are paid minimum wage, but a majority of their pay is used for child support, victim restitution, court costs and other fees associated with their terms.

“What we do is helping out the state of Oregon monetarily,” Kodama said. “We felt like this was a great way to be socially responsible.”

iTySE now contracts with OCE to manufacture their products. In the future, the facility will also be responsible for shipping online orders, Pierson said.

With their product and processes well under way, Pierson and Kodama said they continue to push forward with their venture.

“Business is getting better every week,” Pierson said.

Both women said they hope to make a difference by encouraging people to stop using plastic bags and utilize reusable shopping bags.

“The average family uses an average of 400 plastic bags a year. This is a really simple way to have a huge impact on the environment,” Pierson said. “I don't like it as hard.”

Pierson and Kodama also said they are thankful to be business partners, adding their skills seem to compliment one another.

“We found a way to work together and impact the environment,” Pierson said. “We just have a ton of fun.”

To learn more about iTySE, visit www.ityse.biz. iTySEs are also available at Red Apple.



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Inmate Eddie Jaimes, 25, of Culver, gets a hug from a friend on Wednesday afternoon at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution's first recognition ceremony for inmates who completed their GEDs. Jaimes, who dropped out of Culver High School in the 10th grade, said he hopes to find a job doing electrical work at the end of his 70-month sentence.

Photos by Pete Erickson / The Bulletin

Taking pride in learning

Deer Ridge inmates honored at GED ceremony

By [Lauren Dake](#) / *The Bulletin*

Published: March 19, 2009 4:00AM PST

Instead of a cap and gown, those being honored wore denim with the word "inmate" stamped on their uniforms. An asterisk next to a name in the program noted not what university the inmate was attending, but that he had been released.

But the sentiment at the small recognition ceremony, held for inmates who completed their GEDs at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in Madras on Wednesday, was similar to any graduation — a sense of accomplishment and pride.

"I've always set a bad example for my sister," said Flavio Plancarte, 24, of Madras, who is serving a 33-month sentence. "But by getting my GED, I'm setting a better example."

His younger sister attended his graduation.

Nine inmates entered the Deer Ridge cafeteria to “Pomp and Circumstance.” It marked the prison’s first inmate GED recognition ceremony. Along with the help of inmate tutors and instructors from Central Oregon Community College, the graduates passed the five tests necessary — math, science, social studies, reading and writing — to receive their GEDs.

A few months into his freshman year of high school, Gregory Supp, now 25, dropped out. He could read, but his handwriting was illegible and he had no idea how to spell. So getting his GED wasn’t easy.

“For three months, I constantly studied, for about eight hours a day,” he said.

The aspiring baker has been arrested 25 times in the past 11 years. “This is the first time I’ve accomplished something positive in my life,” he said.

Cody Yeager, the director of education at Deer Ridge, said it’s important to recognize the accomplishments of the inmates.

“One of our responsibilities is to model pro-social behavior,” Yeager said. “We try to make it as similar to the outside world as we can. ... For many, this is the only time they’ve been recognized.” She said educating inmates is one of the surest ways to prevent them from ending up back in prison. “If they graduate with a GED, it cuts their chances of coming back by 20 to 30 percent,” she said.

“When you are in here, working with them, you can see a clear correlation between the lack of education and why they are here,” Yeager said.

Nearly 70 percent of the adult male population who enter Oregon Department of Correction facilities don’t have their high school diplomas, according to information from Parrish Van Wert, the community development coordinator for Deer Ridge.

Olga Kalugin, 19, drove three hours to watch her brother get his GED. She knew her brother was excited about the accomplishment, and she thought it would be important to show her support. Kalugin sat in the front row as her brother entered the room.

“He’s my brother, and I love him,” she said.

For Dionisy Kalugin, 25, who has eight days left of his 17-month sentence, having his sister attend his graduation meant a lot. “I’m happy, you know,” he said.

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