

For Immediate Release

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“Tomorrow Begins Today” Capital Campaign Raising Funds For New Manistee County Senior Center

Manistee - - The “Tomorrow Begins Today” Capital Campaign is currently raising funds to convert the former St. Mary’s Church complex into a new Manistee County Senior Center, to be known as the Wagoner Center. The Manistee County Council on Aging (MCCOA), which recently acquired the former church from the Catholic Diocese of Gaylord, has been working diligently to secure the funding for this very important community project.

“A lot has happened since we kicked off the capital campaign back in February,” said Sarah Howard, Executive Director of the MCCOA. “We are continuing to meet with individual donors and have applied for several grants through private foundations. We have also engaged with USDA Rural Development to identify potential sources of funding that may be available to us through their programs.”

The total goal of the campaign is \$3.4 million, however, the immediate focus is on raising the funds to complete Phase 1 at a cost of \$1.9 million. “We have our sights set on Phase 1 which will convert the former parish center into our temporary dining and gathering facility and allow us to relocate from the present and seriously over-crowded Senior Center on River Street,” said Howard. “We are also planning to get started on re-roofing the entire complex as the existing roof system is failing and we need to protect the building from the elements.” The estimated cost of the new roof is \$300,000. “As you can imagine, the roof is rather complex with the vertical surface and what not,” added Howard, “our architect, Kendra Thompson, is preparing bid documents for the roof so we can get started on it as soon as possible.”

While the Wagoner Center's primary emphasis will be on meeting the needs of area seniors, it will truly benefit the entire community. "Day-to-day, the Wagoner Center will help us improve and expand the services we can offer to the local senior population, but it will also be available as an asset to the entire community," said Howard. "It will be a perfect venue for weddings, reunions and a variety of other community events. We expect it to get used a lot."

Phase 1 includes a new commercial kitchen that will accommodate the Meals on Wheels program. "Meals on Wheels is a separate entity from the Senior Center, however, the partnership we have with them is vital to helping fight poverty among our senior population," added Howard. Meals on Wheels prepares and serves over 1,000 meals per week at congregate meal sites or delivered to homebound individuals by volunteer drivers. "Between Meals on Wheels and our monthly food pantry, hunger persists as one of the most common problems facing our senior citizens," said Howard.

Mary Kaye Wilkosz, a MCCOA board member and chairperson of the capital campaign committee is optimistic the Manistee community will support this once-in-a-lifetime project. "The capital campaign is off to a great start," said Wilkosz. "Once people learn the details of the project, they are very interested in supporting the cause. We have received several significant donations in the past couple of weeks and can really feel the momentum building." Wilkosz invites everyone to check out the capital campaign website (www.tomorrowbeginstodaycampaign.org) where people can view a short video or choose to donate on-line. "The video does a nice job of explaining the situation at our current Senior Center," added Wilkosz. "It is bursting at the seams and our staff and volunteers spend a lot of extra time setting up and tearing down for each and every activity. It's not very efficient."

Moving to the Wagoner Center will alleviate this problem and provide all the room necessary for the MCCOA to meet the present and future needs of the Manistee County senior population. “Phase 1 gives us more than twice the space we have at the current Senior Center and will provide us the opportunity to deliver services and programs that we can’t deliver now, simply because we don’t have the room to do it,” said Howard. “We know that one thing is certain: our senior population will continue to increase as the Baby Boomers age.”

While the space is relatively large, it presents the possibilities of collaborating with other entities that can serve the senior community. “We are having conversations with numerous potential partners who may benefit from having a presence at the Wagoner Center,” added Wilkosz. “There are some very exciting things being talked about behind the scenes. We will be announcing details in the very near future.”

Several other fundraisers have already taken place with more planned in the coming weeks. “The Manistee Chamber of Commerce 2019 Leadership Team has been raising funds for an outdoor patio, a volunteer group from the Senior Center held a spaghetti dinner last month and are planning a community yard sale,” said Wilkosz. “It all adds up.” Follow the MCCOA Facebook page for upcoming events and activities.

In the meantime, it’s business as usual at the Senior Center. “We do pretty well considering the constraints we face,” said Howard. “At the end of the day, we exist to assist our senior population in many different ways. We are here for them.” Anyone interested in volunteering at the Manistee County Senior Center is welcome to call or stop in. “We can always use more volunteers and folks getting involved,” said Howard. “Volunteering is a great way to give back to the community and meet some new people.

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