

# the local scene...



**Edith Heavysides, left, reaches for her dessert and chats with Evelyn Porter, and Vicky Taylor, who passes a plateful of food across the counter. The two cooks have been with the Seniors Activity Centre from the time the kitchen was first opened.**

photo by Chuck Nisbett

## Seniors' home away from home

by **ARNOLD OLSON**

If you're lucky, you can get lunch for \$3.

If you're 20, however, you have a 40-year wait before the dinner gong sounds for you.

The Seniors Activity Centre at 4th Avenue and Brunswick Street offers economical meals with a home-cooked taste every day.

They cater to people 60 or older and their guests.

As an example, Plus! magazine was treated to pork cutlet, potatoes and vegetables, along with a cup of coffee. That scrumptious meal, along with some pleasant company, set the tummy up for rhubarb pie as dessert.

Daily inexpensive lunches like that offer the elderly a chance to socialize — as well as keep their budgets in line.

Diane Parlett, the administrator, said the centre has always had a kitchen service. At first it was open to members only but later was expanded to include all seniors and their guests.

Members are those who will be 60 or older within a calendar year. Their spouses may join as associate members, without voting privileges.

Other affiliate members are those recommended by doctors and the hospital — people who have had strokes or who are otherwise handicapped and cannot care for them-

selves. These people, although younger than 60, benefit from the socializing at the centre.

The centre, the city's public library until 1962, is a spacious, airy place that allows seniors to relax and visit both on the main floor and the basement area. The latter is outfitted with pool tables and other recreation items. The place has a small library of hard-cover books and makes a bit of money selling paperbacks that are donated to them.

But it's the food that attracts people at lunchtime. The place exudes delicious smells onto the sidewalk.

"It's a fantastic service we provide to seniors in Prince George, because we subsidize the meals," Parlett said.

"Our goal is to break even in the kitchen. We want to keep the meals as reasonably priced as we can for those seniors who are on a restricted and limited income.

"We find, too, this is the only hot meal they'll have in the day. A lot of them are single and it's too much to cook a meal."

She said several women eat their main meal at the centre, and have light snacks at home in the evening. Some women take soup home with them.

"It simplifies their shopping. They might have transportation problems and shopping is a problem."

Half the centre's income is from bingos and casinos, with the balance from

interest in term deposits and membership fees, as well as other fund-raising ventures.

The 400 Club, with membership at \$100 a year, is a new financing venture that has been successful, she said. To attract members, each month \$1,000 is given away by draw.

As well, Parlett said, in a five-year program two additional \$1,000-draws are held in December and \$10,000 and \$5,000 draws will be held.

"It does generate some much-needed revenue for our centre."

She said the centre's finances had to be reviewed because of encroaching competition by other bingos and be-

cause of lower sharing of profits with the provincial government.

Although the centre has about 600 members, Parlett said she'd like to see more seniors use the kitchen facilities and perhaps join when they see what other services are offered.

"Compared to 10 years ago, the elderly are staying in Prince George, in spite of the weather. They can enjoy a better standard of living here than in Vancouver."

She said they can afford to own their own homes or pay rent here, whereas in the Lower Mainland housing costs drain their resources.



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