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Magna senior center opens - Community » New facility gets patrons' rave reviews, expected to boost memberships.

By Brandon Loomis

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Magna » It used to be that Main Street here was the place many of the west-valley kids went for ice cream or a sandwich, or where their parents bought their cars.

"We rode the train out here to high school," 80-year-old Cyprus High graduate Wilma Bliss said, also remembering time spent at two movie houses here, away from her once-rural home in the Hunter area of what is now West Valley City. "Everything was out here. This was where the action was."

The copper mining township's core has gone through ups and downs over the years, including a recent Main Street renaissance, but for many of those who remember the old glory Tuesday marked a high point. That's when county dignitaries and hundreds of senior citizens officially opened the new Magna Kennecott Senior Center. Bliss and her friends were ready to declare Magna Main Street again a center of their social lives.

"Fabulous!" 80-year-old Mary Thomas said of the building while she signed up for some of the classes volunteers and staffers will teach free for those 60 and older. "They have a little bit of everything for the seniors."

She was especially smitten with a tile mural on a hallway wall inside the center, depicting many of the old-time shops as they once were -- a few of which, like Colosimo's market, are still there -- alongside Kennecott's stacks. It brought back a flood of memories for the 1947 Cyprus graduate.

"That was old Magna to us, which we loved," she said. Small town, great people. Wonderful, friendly people."

Both women were buoyed by the center's opening, and said they'll be back regularly.

"I'm going to come down to exercise," Thomas said, pointing through a window to the treadmills, weight machines and open floor of an exercise room. "I'm going to join the choir."

"I'm going to come out to do the exercises and the painting class," Bliss said.

Both are still driving [something that the center also aids through senior safe-driving courses], but noted that they can catch the center's vans to get here if they call 24 hours ahead of time.

The building is 19,000 square feet with a brick, block and corrugated steel exterior with an outdoor sculpture giving an ornamental end to Main Street against the foothills. It replaces a small meeting hall down the street, which will remain a community center next to where the new Magna Library is rising.

The center cost Salt Lake County \$5 million, with some help from Kennecott, now owned by Rio Tinto, in acquiring the land, said David Turner, program manager for the county's senior centers. It includes a computer lab and free wireless Internet for those with laptops, plus a lending library, classrooms, fitness center, dining room with stage and a microphone wire to assist hearing aids, and an outdoor patio.

The center's goal is to "build community" for seniors while helping improve their life skills and such physical abilities as maintaining balance, just to name one, Turner said.

"What we're really trying to do is prolong independence and healthy lifestyles," he said. That differs from senior centers' introduction decades ago, when they were essentially nutrition programs, though the Magna center offers a big lunch every day. The price is \$2.50 for seniors 60 and older and \$5.25 for their guests.

The building conforms with the county's environmental sustainability goals, Turner said, because it uses 30 onsite geothermal wells and is full of natural light to keep electricity costs down. Some of the flooring is renewable bamboo.

The new center is expected to attract 2,000 members, compared to 500-750 at the smaller Magna center, he said. Memberships are free, but users are asked to scan their cards at each visit to help track usage.

"The message that this senior center is giving people in the community is, 'You are important. You can still learn,'" said 81-year-old Dorothy Bello Johnson, who grew up here but now lives in Holladay. "I wouldn't mind coming back here.