

FEATURING THE PEOPLE THAT MAKE OUR COMMUNITY GREAT!

Our FACES

CHEYENNE FOOD PANTRIES:

Helping out Laramie County residents one meal at a time

The Humanitarian Issue

What's inside:

- Cheyenne Food Pantries: Helping out residents one meal at a time
- Medical Missions: Hospital providers help out in Guatemala
- Kevin Gill's generosity lives on through foundation
- Richard Johnson: Raising dollars for community challenges

and much more!

WyomingTribuneEagle
MORE THAN A NEWSPAPER



ELEMENT CHURCH

FOOD PANTRY

SUNDAYS 10:00AM-1:00PM





Celebrating



1938 • 82 Years • 2020

You'll Love Our Brand of Dealin'!

tyrrellwyo.com



TYRRELLWYO.COM

2142 West Lincolnway, Cheyenne | 307-634-2540 • 1919 Westland Rd, Cheyenne | 307-634-1924
3609 East Grand Avenue, Laramie | 307-745-7315

FEATURING THE PEOPLE THAT MAKE OUR COMMUNITY GREAT!

Our FACES

INSIDE THIS EDITION: HUMANITARIANS

Buddy Bucks: Pine Bluffs students helps kids celebrate the holidays.	4
Cheyenne Animal Shelter and Black Dog Animal Rescue providing services for those in need . .	6
Cheyenne Food Pantries: Helping out residents one meal at a time.	8
Medical Missions: Hospital providers help out in Guatemala.	10
Richard Johnson: Raising dollars for community challenges.	12
Kevin Gill's generosity lives on through foundation.	14

"TEACHERS AFFECT ETERNITY; NO ONE CAN TELL WHERE THEIR INFLUENCE STOPS."
—Henry Books Adams



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO IS THE PRIMARY INSTITUTE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE OF COLORADO

EXTENDED.UNCO.EDU



UNC

Extended Campus

NEXT ISSUE: HAPPENINGS

Be a part of the Happenings Issue

- Send in story ideas
- Advertise

Contact:
307-633-3161
lhernandez@wyomingnews.com



Look for it in March 2020



Students hold competitions to see who can raise the most money for Buddy Bucks.

Buddy Bucks\$

Pine Bluffs students helps kids celebrate the holidays

By Rachel Girt

For the Wyoming Tribune Eagle

For Ashley Rousseau, the best Christmas was helping a family in need to celebrate the holiday through Pine Bluffs High School's Buddy Bucks Program.

Rousseau likes to share her joyful stories that she has experienced as the Pine Bluffs High School Student Council adviser, which is in charge of organizing the program.

One year, a former student came to the counselor and was worried about his sister not having a Christmas, Rousseau said.

"We bought for the whole family, and the student beamed upon returning from break," Rousseau said. "That was the best Christmas. You didn't have to buy for me, too. Seeing her smile was enough."

In its 20th year, Buddy Bucks tries to ensure that no child living in Pine Bluffs or other rural communities in Laramie County will go without presents under the Christmas tree.

"We have always focused on making each family have a good Christmas," Rousseau said.

In its early years, the program focused just on Pine Bluffs kids in

need, but later expanded to help other schools in the area. The Pine Bluffs Student Council has also helped Burns High School start a Buddy Bucks program.

Pine Bluffs Student Council member Alexis DePaulitte has been involved with the program for the last three years.

"I think the Buddy Bucks program is important because it allows for people in the community, including the Pine Bluffs High School, to provide necessary items for people in need within our community," DePaulitte said.

The student council raises money through creative collection efforts like hosting a spirit week to encourage high school students to bring donations that correspond with the theme of each day.

Other past fundraising efforts have included holding a Mad Minute collection, where each class has a minute to put as much money into a baggie as possible. By itself, that quick competition has raised almost \$3,000 in previous years. The student council has also held competitions between schools and had a district-wide duel with Burns a few years back.



Several Pine Bluffs High School students buying Christmas presents for Buddy Bucks.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PINE BLUFFS HIGH SCHOOL



“We had had years where we brought in a couple thousand dollars, and a few years ago we were able to rocket to \$5,500,” Rousseau said. “It is the great years that allow us the flexibility to support the community without hosting a huge fundraiser each year.”

While the funds are predominately used for Pine Bluffs and surrounding rural communities, the program has been able to donate to the Laramie County Toys for Tots program in Cheyenne over the last couple of years.

Not all the dollars raised come from within the school. Community members, former recipients and businesses donate, as well.

“While shopping with my brood of students my first year hosting the program, we had a

man pull out a couple hundred dollars and donate directly to the program so more kids could be helped,” Rousseau said.

Another year, a parent who received Buddy Bucks was so thankful that she returned to the school two years later and made a donation because she was finally able to, Rousseau said.

To select recipients, Rousseau works closely with the school counselors to develop a list each year. The program typically spends between \$70 and \$100 per recipient on the list.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, families will receive gift cards, but in previous years the student council went shopping for games, books and winter gear for each recipient, Rousseau said.

Rousseau said community service is the norm for Pine Bluff High School students and not a chore or something to put on a resume.

“The community of Pine Bluffs is so giving and involved, and that instills the need and drive for our students to serve our community,” Rousseau said.

“Community service is important because it enables students to contribute their time and give back to the community,” DePaulitte added.

In addition to the Buddy Bucks program, the high school has a program where students do acts of service with a mentor group.

“We are always in the community helping,” Rousseau added.



Cheyenne Animal Shelter and Black Dog Animal Rescue

Providing services to those in need

By Rachel Girt

For the Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Acknowledging the critical role pets play in our lives, the Cheyenne Animal Shelter and Black Dog Animal Rescue have offered free pet food and a variety of services to those in need for many years.

"It's just not reasonable to think that people who lose their jobs or face some kind of food or housing insecurity have to get rid of their pet," said Britney Wallesch, BDAR executive director.

Vanessa Woodin, CAS director

of operations, explained that animals are a huge part of people's lives, and someone might not go get the help they need because of having to leave an animal behind.

That is why CAS has partnered with Meals on Wheels to deliver pet food to seniors who have pets and provides low-cost boarding for those staying at the COMEA House homeless shelter and Safehouse Services, the local domestic violence shelter, Woodin said.

CAS also offers a pet food

assistance program, allowing recipients to come in once every three months to request food. There are no qualifications, except filling out some paperwork.

Income-eligible owners are eligible for CAS's Big Fix, a proactive program that offers low-cost neutering and has helped owners in need with low-cost veterinary services in emergencies, such as if a pet was hit by a car or has Parvo. Inexpensive microchipping is also available with no income restrictions.

To address having litters of unwanted puppies, kittens or bunnies, CAS has created a new program that will pay the mother for free if the owner surrenders the litter to the shelter. Many times, when this happens, the owner cannot afford spaying their animal, and that is when CAS can help out, Woodin explained.

Wallesch pointed out that the web of available social services should provide for the whole family in need, including their pets.



Cheyenne Animal Shelter employees load a shipment of food for pets in need. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHEYENNE ANIMAL SHELTER

HOW TO HELP

To donate or learn more about available services, go online to:
 Cheyenne Animal Shelter:
www.cheyenneanimalshelter.org
 Black Dog Animal Rescue:
www.bdar.org



Koda poses in front of shipment of food from Black Dog Animal Rescue. PHOTO COURTESY OF BLACK DOG ANIMAL RESCUE

“We make sure that people don’t have to make hard decisions about feeding their pets when they’re having to make hard decisions about how to feed themselves and their family,” Wallesch said.

BDAR offers the Empty Dish Pet Pantry program and a low-cost microchipping. Future plans include being able to one day offer a spay and neuter clinic at its adoption center.

Each year, the demand for the Empty Dish Pet Pantry program has grown, but BDAR has seen a significant uptick in its use this year. So far this year, BDAR has distributed 13,700 pounds of pet food, which is about a 30% more than last year.

When the pandemic hit in March, the pantry ran out of food, which has not happened in a long time. BDAR relies on regular donations

from corporate sponsors like Target, Walmart and Cheyenne Dog Food Company, as well as the community.

BDAR put out the call for help and was inundated with donations, which has helped the nonprofit stay on top of the demand, Wallesch said.

Prior to the pandemic, BDAR offered food distribution on a specific day, but has altered that to accommodate the demand. BDAR has noticed during the pandemic that people’s lives are very hard to predict and are very unstable, and they’re just coming all the time, Wallesch said.

Most are new to the program and have been laid off or lost part of their family’s income, Wallesch said. “They are hoping to have to use it for a short period of time. I

think that they expect that there’s still going to be a job for them at some future date.”

Under BDAR’s program, recipients are only given food for up to four pets, which is the pet limit within the city of Cheyenne. The amount of food given is based on the size of the pets. To receive assistance for longer than three months, recipients typically are asked to provide proof of need.

Due to rising demand in the community, BDAR has waived the requirement that long-term recipients show proof of need. “We’re just assuming that when people come in, they need it,” she said.

The best place for a pet is with the family who loves it, especially during these difficult times, Wallesch added. “If we can help make sure that that relationship stays intact, the better.”

Cheyenne Food Pantries:

Helping out Laramie County residents one meal at a time

By Rachel Girt

For the Wyoming Tribune Eagle

When Tia Buckley's family moved to Cheyenne, Needs Inc. provided them with the extra support, helping them with food and clothing.

"We don't have any family members here, so that extra help comes from Needs Inc.," Buckley explained. "They are like family to us."

In addition to serving Laramie County residents like the Buckley family, Needs and other food pantries in Cheyenne have experienced a significant increase in new clients impacted by temporary COVID-19 quarantines and two-income households that have lost a full income.

"The amount of food that we're serving today is 180% more than what we were serving prior to the pandemic in early March," said Needs Executive Director Taylor Albert.

When people, especially hourly workers, have to take those two weeks off of work, that is really disrupting their budget and their ability to buy food or pay rent and utilities, Albert said.

Needs Inc. food pantry provides food to Laramie County residents through three different types of

food boxes: a produce box available daily with no ID requirements, a commodities food box available every 10 days to anyone with a valid photo ID, and a monthly food box that requires income verification. The pantry, located at 900 Central Ave., is open Monday through Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

"We are not the bridge piece supplementing food for low- to moderate-income households anymore," Albert said. "More people are relying on us to provide their full food for an entire month."

That has required Needs to step up its fundraising efforts to keep up with demand. Albert said what the organization needs most is monetary donations to provide a well-rounded assortment of foods for clients and to replace the walk-in freezer and cooler.

"The amount of support we have received has been incredible," Albert said. "We have people who have signed over their whole stimulus check to us to purchase food, as well as the Boy Scouts, schools and businesses holding food drives for us."

To navigate this new food bank world, Needs has been making changes to be more

HOW TO HELP

To learn more about their services, donate or volunteer, please visit the following websites:

- **Needs Inc. food pantry:**
www.needsinc.org
- **Element Church food pantry:**
www.elementchurch.life
- **St. Joseph's Food Pantry:**
www.stjosephscheyenne.org/food-pantry

Additional food pantry resources can be found at www.nohungerwyo.org/laramie-county.



Workers and volunteers loading up shipments for customers at Needs Inc. and Element Church. The pantries have been serving all walks of life since COVID started.

accessible, quicker and have fewer requirements, Albert said. "There's a whole spectrum of people's stories and what they've been through and what kind of support they need from us."

Element Church

Element Church's food pantry started four years ago to address a need for food assistance for those who didn't have the paperwork or identification or meet government qualifications. The church allocates 10% of every dollar tithed to its outreach efforts, like the food pantry.

"We want to take care of Cheyenne and the people who live here," said Eiron Wilson, outreach

director for Element Church.

The food pantry, located just east of the church at 600 E. Carlson St. #201, provides large bags of food to anyone who comes to the drive-thru on Sundays between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Element Church also added a delivery service to assist those unable to pick up a food bag. There are no requirements or documentation needed to receive food.

"Our intention was never to have as big of a pantry as we have now," Wilson said. "When we first started, we were serving about 200 people a month. Now we're at about 1,400 people a month."

Element's food pantry budget has gone from \$2,000 a month to \$8,000 to handle the demand. They have



The Element Church food pantry is located at 600 E. Carlson St. #201. Stop by on Sunday from 10 a.m. till 1 p.m. There are more requirements or documentation needed to receive food.

The Needs Inc. food pantry is located at 900 Central Ave. in Cheyenne. Donations are accepted Monday-Thursday 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m. and Friday 8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m. PHOTOS BY RACHEL AND STEVEN GIRT

also received help from Wyoming Food Bank of the Rockies and U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farmers to Families Food Box program.

Wilson attributed the increase to the impact of the pandemic. "Last year at this time, we had only served 5,232 people, and now we're at 11,150 people."

Prior to COVID, the food pantry served the homeless population, just above homeless population or people who didn't have paperwork to be here, Wilson said.

"Today, we are serving all walks of life," Wilson said. "We're seeing grandparents, mothers with kids in the car and vehicles that you wouldn't think need to be in a drive-thru pantry line. Everyone is feeling the pinch of not working, losing jobs or having kids home."

St. Joseph's

St. Joseph's Food Pantry doubled the number of people in need of food from 390 to 780 a month, said pantry director Renee Gamino.

She added that the pantry is seeing new people with food insecurities and an increase of people living in campers, clients moving in with friends and family, and grandparents raising their grandchildren.

Earlier this year, a single mother with three kids

who was laid off her job came into St. Joseph's Food Pantry and started to cry when a volunteer checked her in for food, Gamino said. She had been giving what food she had to her children and eating very little herself.

As things settled down, that mother got her job back and donated money to the pantry to help others in need, Gamino added.

"The amount of food that we're serving today is 180% more than what we were serving prior to the pandemic in early March."

Taylor Albert
Needs Inc. Executive Director

Unemployed and laid-off people see the pantry as a hand up and not a handout, Gamino explained. "People want their jobs back. They want to work, make their own money, provide for their families and pay it forward."

St. Joseph's Food Pantry asks for a photo I.D. and proof of residency like a utility bill or rental agreement. When the recipient arrives, volunteers ask them to self-report about the household income and number of individuals. The pantry, located at 206 Van Lennen Ave., now offers a drive-thru service and is typically open Tuesdays

and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 12:50 p.m.

If they are barely over income and have special circumstances, they can be approved for a special food box, Gamino added.

"We couldn't have done any of this without the support of the community, our partners, ongoing monetary donations, or the pantry volunteers," she added.

The Buckley family can attest to the positive impact of receiving food from one of Cheyenne's food pantries.

Until recently, the Buckleys have survived only on Tia's husband's income to support the family of five, which includes three kids, a 1-year-old, a 5-year-old and an 11-year-old. The extra boost from the Needs Inc. food pantry has been very welcome, Buckley said.

The family regularly receives from Needs a monthly food box that consists of a variety of items like meat, milk, eggs, butter, sides, canned goods and snacks. Not including the meat, Buckley suspects that she would have to pay well over \$100 if she went to the grocery store.

"Needs Inc. is my number one go-to place, for sure," Buckley added. "The staff is so sweet, and they help you out to your car if you need it. I encourage anybody and everybody needing help to check it out."

▼ Joann Bourlier-Childress and Dr. Jessica Hughes stop for a picture with some local kids.



Dr. Jessica Hughes, Dr. Lisa K. Burton and Joann Bourlier-Childress in Guatemala.



◀ Members of CRMC hold up the hospital's flag while on a medical mission in Guatemala.



◀ Two sisters who live in La Pila, Guatemala. ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOANN BOURLIER-CHILDRESS



CRMC Medical Missions:

Hospital providers help out in Guatemala

By Rachel Girt

For the Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Volunteering on medical missions to a tiny Guatemalan village has filled up her heart, said Joann Bourlier-Childress.

"Once you serve people who are in need and see how they flourish, it's something you'll never stop doing," explained Bourlier-Childress, who is APP director for Cheyenne Regional Medical Center's Emergency Department.

Bourlier-Childress and her best friend, Dr. Jessica Hughes, the medical director for the CRMC Emergency Department, started going to Guatemala as part of Great Commission Outreach in 2017. Their good friend Dr. Lisa K. Burton, a CRMC general surgeon, joined them a year later

after hearing about the profound impact the medical missions had on their lives.

"Both Jess and I realized that something was missing in our lives and our hearts, and this was it," Bourlier-Childress said. "It was the most amazing experience of my life."

"When we go to Guatemala, we see more patients in a day than we ever see in our real-life jobs, but this fulfilling work recharges and reenergizes us for our daily lives," Burton added.

They learned about the medical missions from Dr. Lawrence Bean and Dr. Eugene Gicheru, who founded the nonprofit Great Commission Outreach to enrich lives through service and serve as an antidote to burnout.

Bean and Gicheru came

to Cheyenne to work as an interim medical director back in 2014. They formed a bond and friendship with Hughes, Bourlier-Childress and others that led to the creation of Summit Medical Group, which today manages the emergency room at CRMC and Iverson Memorial Hospital.

"We recognized that we all have a heart of service, wanting to help people and make their lives better," Hughes said, describing what aligned the management group together in 2016. "We started Summit Medical Group together with the premise that we wanted to create a speedy, provider-owned group that basically spreads the culture of service."

Valuing a culture of service has spread beyond work into the

health care providers' personal lives.

"All three of us are so passionate about trying to live a culture of service, whether we are at work or home," Hughes added. "We feel grateful for everything we have, including our jobs and families. We want to give that back to people."

Great Commission Outreach holds quarterly missions to provide free medical care to La Pila, a small Mayan village located up a mountainside about 40 miles southwest of Guatemala City. The trips typically include a medical clinic, pharmacy, construction service project and Bible school.

The residents of La Pila have so many needs, Hughes explained. They don't have easy access to



Residents
of La Pila,
Guatemala.
PHOTO
COURTESY
OF JOANN
BOURLIER-
CHILDRESS

clean water, drinking from nearby streams. The men work in the surrounding fields for about a dollar a day. The local school is the only place where running water and electricity are available.

"We're making sure that people are getting their regular medications, doing the clinic to see acute issues, following up on chronic problems, and conducting house calls to people who cannot leave their homes," Bourlier-Childress said.

The efforts in La Pila revolve around improving the health and keeping children in school. Beyond the visits, the nonprofit also raises funds to provide a daily healthy breakfast for every child enrolled in school and a monthly food basket for every family with a child enrolled in the school.

In between the mission trips, Great Commission Outreach has hired someone in Antigua, who brings the food baskets to the village several times a week and makes sure patients with chronic conditions receive their medications. He also alerts the nonprofit if some special needs or emergencies need addressing.

Bourlier-Childress pointed out that their efforts have made a significant difference. A 2017 World Health Organization study showed 100% of the children were malnourished. In 2019, that number dropped to 20%.

Construction projects at the school have included building a water filtration system, putting in flushing toilets and tiled bathrooms, adding concrete to the center area and building benches.

"We base a lot of our work around the

school because we want to make sure that the kids stay in school and obtain their education," Hughes said. "That's how this culture is going to thrive is if their kids are educated, and their kids go on to do great things."

Already several kids have gone on to high school, which was unheard of in that village, and are interested in health care. The nonprofit has set up scholarships to help students pay to attend high school, which is located down the mountain.

"We hope someday to see a full circle with some of the students coming back and taking care of their own village," Burton said.

While the work is fulfilling, Burton explained that having limited resources makes the work challenging and sometimes heartbreaking. Great Commission Outreach pays for the basic medications through fundraising, but any special needs or hospitalizations are often paid for outofpocket by the providers.

More than a year ago, the three Cheyenne women tried to provide care to Myrna, a young teenage girl who had a tumor. They paid for her CT scan, hospital admission, nutrition and antibiotics. The hospital later determined that her treatment was not a priority and didn't operate on her.

"We helped her family, and we helped her be comfortable in her house so that she could die at home," Burton said, apologizing for becoming upset telling the story. "Seeing something like that, where you know you can't give them everything that they need, is difficult."

When asked why she volunteers in

Guatemala instead of here, Hughes first pointed out all three of them regularly volunteer at Habitat for Humanity, Head Start and other places here in town.

"The special thing about Guatemala is that these people just have so many needs, and we feel like we can really have a significant impact on their lives," Hughes explained. "If I can influence two people's lives, and then they can go influence others, the result is exponential."

Hughes gave the example of her mentorship of Javier, one of their young Guatemalan translators, who was 18 when they first met. Over the years, she has helped him in many ways, including encouraging him to go back to school and putting him through college. Today, that translator has dedicated his life to going to villages and helping people in his own community.

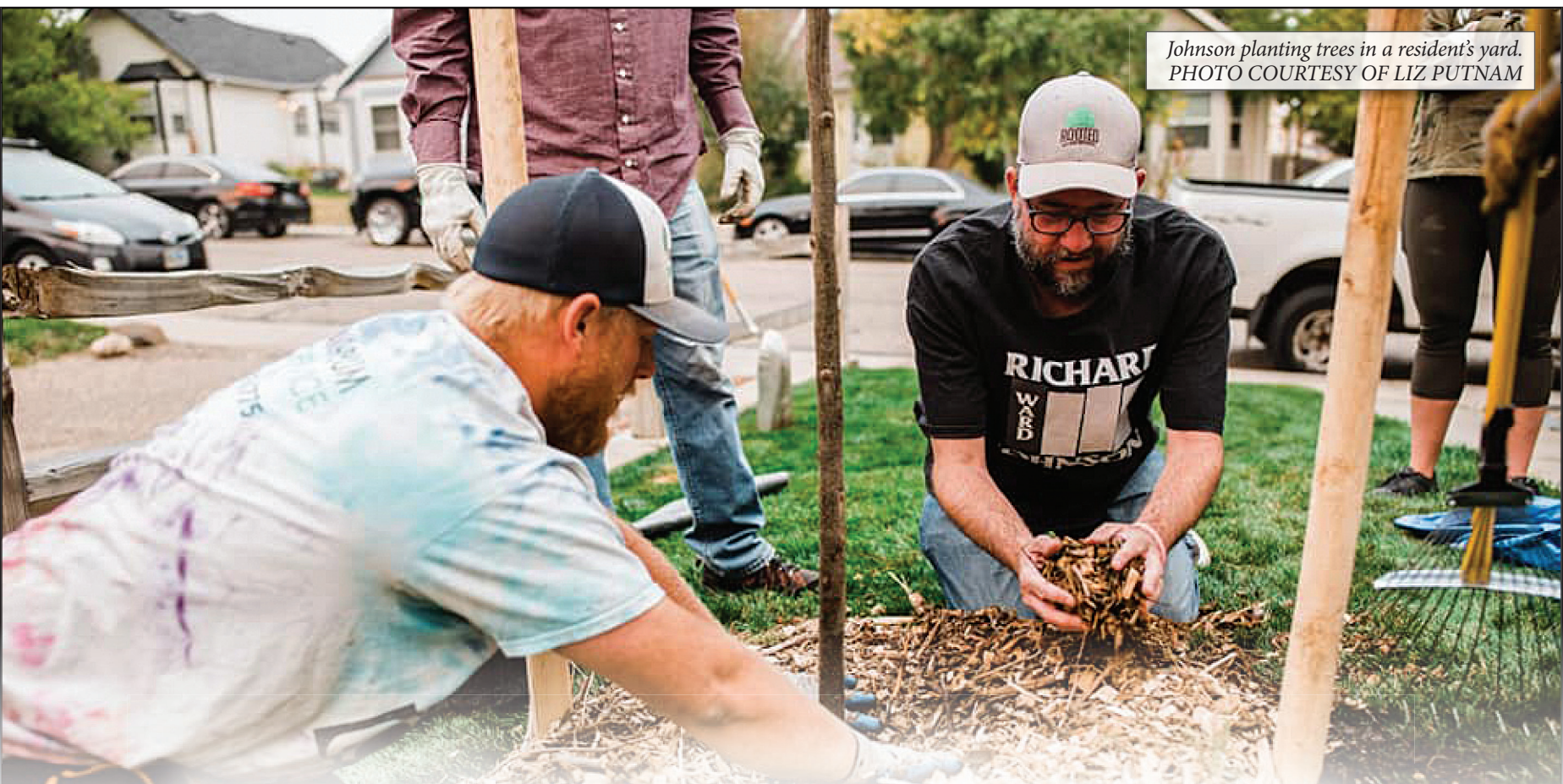
"If we can spread this kind of culture of service and love, our world will be a better place," she added.

The three friends' next goal is to help the nonprofit expand the program to Pachute, a nearby village where about 800 people live.

"The results that we have seen over the last few years in La Pila have been amazing, and we want to see if we can help more people in a second village," Hughes said.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a hold on their plans as Guatemala prohibited travel to maintain safety, but the women are hopeful they can return soon.

If you are interested in learning more, or even participating in a future trip, go online to www.greatcommissionoutreach.org.



Johnson planting trees in a resident's yard.
PHOTO COURTESY OF LIZ PUTNAM

Richard Johnson

Raising dollars for community challenges

By Rachel Girt

For the Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Richard Johnson regularly takes on community-driven challenges simply because they need to be done.

"I always think of everything as a challenge; that I have to beat all these challenges," Johnson said. "When I see the results, the impact on people, I can't take it. I tear up."

While dedicated to helping people fallen on hard times or on the fringe of society, Johnson simply cannot resist a good challenge that helps people in the community. He

has advocated for the homeless, community art and beautification projects, and for prevention of domestic violence, suicide and drug and alcohol addiction.

Over the last couple of years, he helped spearhead raising \$300,000 for the splash pad downtown. Earlier this year, he collected 100 boxes of cereal for the COMEA Shelter in seven days. Right now, he is raising \$25,000 for Needs Inc. to buy a new walk-in cooler.

"I don't know if I'll ever see that walk-in cooler ever," he said,

laughing. "But at the same time, it's like \$25,000, let's see if I can actually do this."

Johnson explains that he has always moved to the beat of his own drum.

"No matter what, I'm always on the fringe," Johnson said. "Anything that people think is supposed to be mainstream, I really don't ever fall into those guidelines."

Part of it may be that his parents gave him a lot of freedom growing up, he said. "If I dyed my hair or pierced my face, they knew that

would heal and my hair would grow back, so as long as I didn't have tattoos on my face or was in jail. My parents knew which battles to fight."

A pretty unorthodox kid, Johnson gravitated to skateboarding while attending Johnson Junior High and continued through his high school years at East. "I was never very good and focused more on skateboard photography," he said.

After graduating from East in 1992, Johnson's desire to be a skateboard photographer warred with his obsession with the Civil



Johnson in front of the Clark House.
PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD JOHNSON



Johnson collected community donations under the Charitree in his front yard.
PHOTO BY ASHLEY CHRISTIANSEN

War and becoming a historian. He and his mother took a road trip around the nation, visiting Civil War sites and photographing skateparks.

All of a sudden, these opportunities presented themselves to Johnson. Tony Hawk, a famous professional skateboarder and entrepreneur, invited Johnson to live with him. Another magazine, led by the creators of “Jackass,” offered to move him to Los Angeles. Johnson turned them down, wanting to focus more on Civil War history and stay in Cheyenne.

Around 2000, the editor of Thrasher Magazine tracked Johnson down at Pete’s Pizza, where he was working at the time, and offered him freelance writing gigs, covering skateboard contests around the nation. That lasted for a couple of years.

Just as Johnson’s interest in skateboarding photography was waning, the city of Cheyenne made skateboarding illegal downtown in 2004.

“That’s when I began focusing on local,” he said.

The city Parks and Recreation Department challenged Johnson to raise money for a skate park. Within two years, Johnson and local skateboarders raised about \$560,000 for the project.

Fast forward a few years later to another ribbon cutting at the skatepark; Johnson’s father whispered in his ear and dared him to enter politics. He goes, “You did such a good job rattling the cage on the outside, let’s see what you can do on the inside.”

Johnson ran for the Ward 3 seat on Cheyenne City Council first in 2014. “I didn’t expect to win,” he said. “I’m sure to a lot of people I’m really off-putting.”

Serving from 2015-19, Johnson made it a point to reach out to the community, not just his constituents. He started a selfie challenge with all of Cheyenne and ended up taking photos with

more than 1,300 people.

Along the way, Johnson garnered a large social media following, which he has used to promote community initiatives and seek input on ideas.

For the last two years, Johnson stepped out of politics, spending time working, traveling and advocating for community-driven initiatives. When out in Cheyenne at a bar or just walking about, random people would stop Johnson and urge him to run again.

He ran for the City Council in the 2020 elections and won. “I have a ton of ideas, like with ordinances, but it’s too early to discuss them,” Johnson added.

As to what motives his endless drive to be involved in the community and travel, Johnson believes that he is living on borrowed time.

“Many close friends have died over the years, and I pretty much live for them,” he said.

Players in the K Gill Foundation golf tournament pose with Kevin's cutout at Airport Golf Club.

Kevin Gill Foundation

Generosity lives on through foundation named after local man



Friday Food Bag Foundation receives a check on behalf of the K Gill Foundation.

By Rachel Girt

For the Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Judy Weickum started to cry on the phone when the K Gill Foundation offered to host a golf tournament for the Friday Food Bag Foundation.

"I couldn't believe it," said Weickum, who is a Friday Food Bag board member.

Over the last three years, the K Gill Foundation has raised a total of \$68,000 for the Friday Food Bag program. Thanks to those donations, approximately 13,600 bags filled with nutritious food have been given to local children who otherwise might not eat well, or at all, during the weekends.

The Friday Food Bag program provides approximately 900 bags

of food each Friday while school is in session to children who get free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch in Laramie County School Districts 1 and 2. The program is funded through donations and grants.

K Gill Foundation was formed in memory of Kevin Gill, one of the Gill Window Company owners, who died while hiking in Colorado. So far, the foundation has donated approximately \$230,000 to different local charities, as well as to Summit County Search & Rescue for its help rescuing Kevin.

Kevin's generosity toward others, even those he didn't know, inspired his friends and family to start a foundation in his honor in 2010,

explained Chuck Lane, foundation vice president. "We all put \$1,000 into a pot and got it rolling."

Kevin graduated from Cheyenne's Central High School in 1983 and attended the University of Wyoming, earning a bachelor's degree in business. For 22 years, Kevin co-owned the Gill Window Company with his father, Nick, and brother Mike.

"Kevin was just a happy-go-lucky guy," said Lane, adding that Kevin influenced him greatly. "He would give you the shirt off his back, and did, in many circumstances, with people."

Receiving funding held special significance for Weickum, who considered Kevin like a third son. He was best friends with her son,

spending a lot of time in their house growing up.

"Personality-wise, Kevin was bigger than life," she recalled. "He was just a super nice guy."

Kevin believed that supporting the local community was a responsibility he owed for the support they had shown to his business. Because of that belief, the foundation has kept donations mostly focused on the Cheyenne community.

When going through donation requests, "we are always thinking about what would Kevin do," Lane added.

The first couple years, the foundation created a Laramie County Community College scholarship in Kevin's name that

The K Gill Foundation golf tournament in 2014 at Airport Golf Club.



▼ Photo of Kevin Gill.



◀ A team poses in front of the K Gill sponsors board at Airport Golf Club. ALL PHOTOS COURTESY K GILL FOUNDATION



gives a \$250 scholarship for the first and second semester. The scholarship requirements are a little unusual in that recipients can't have anything higher than a C.

"That's the kind of thing that Kevin would have done," Lane said. "The guy who has got straight A's, he doesn't need the money. The guy who is struggling with C's that's the guy that needs the money."

The second year, the foundation donated \$17,500 to Isaac Salas' family to help them with medical expenses incurred when their son broke his neck in high school wrestling.

Over the course of the next four years, the foundation donated a total of \$100,000 to the Cheyenne Boys and Girls Club's capital campaign for the building on West Jefferson Road.

The board thought the work they do with the kids is tremendous and wanted to ensure that it got off on the right foot, Lane said.

"The foundation's gift is so special to the Boys & Girls Club, as it is in memory of Kevin Gill, and Kevin's friends and family came together to do something big to honor Kevin," said Rolinda Sample, Boys & Girls Club chief professional officer. "I understand what an impactful decision and large commitment this was for a small group of people to make, and for that, all of us at the club are very appreciative."

The foundation has also contributed \$15,000 to the local Military Order of the Purple Heart Fund and contributed small donations to numerous other charities.

Lane was surprised by the foundation's ability to pull off fundraising and its annual golf tournament and Calcutta. "There is only about 10 of us that run this whole thing, and we are mostly having fun," he said.

"We're not a typical charity from the standpoint that we don't have a big hierarchy of people involved, and we're not out there every

day looking for donations," Lane said. "We're fortunate enough to know enough people that we can get money somehow."

Because Kevin was an avid golfer, the foundation decided to host an annual golf tournament, which sells out, mostly to Kevin's friends, some of who fly in from California and New York.

The tournament pays out to first place, second place and last place, instead of third, which is something Kevin would do, Lane said. "You pay the last-place guy, instead of the third-place guy, because that'll keep last-place guy coming back and having fun."

Lane is very thankful for all those who have supported the foundation's work through the years.

"All the guys do it basically for the love of Kevin, his memory and their love of Mike Gill, too," he said.

OPEN APP & say ***“AHHH”***

Healthcare. Anywhere.

No lines, no waiting room and no need for video. Just answer simple questions about your symptoms from your smartphone, tablet or computer and get treatment or prescriptions from Cheyenne Regional Medical Group providers in an hour.

SmartExam can be used for CRMG Primary Care patients ages four and up and is only available through MyChart.

Activate a MyChart account today!
cheyenneregional.org/mychart.



**Cheyenne Regional
Medical Group**

