

# Senior Center ... a place to find happiness

Did you know there is a Happiness Web site? I didn't until I did a little research.

Happiness.com states, "Happiness is a state of the mind."

The dictionary definition is "feelings of joy and pleasure mingled together." A feeling of happiness is more than just an experience of joy or pleasure. It is a state of mind where the individual feels that "life is good."

On Dec. 5, scientists from Harvard and the University of San Diego released a study that stated happiness is contagious. Spend your time with people who are happy and have a positive, hopeful outlook on the world, and you too will feel better.

It certainly makes sense.

If you spend time around people who are positive and feel good about life, not only are you very likely to feel good too, but scientists have also found that it increases one's longevity. It didn't take me long to witness proof of this at the Sheridan Senior Center.

On Friday evening I attended the Sheridanaires Holiday Concert and was visiting with the audience before the show. I received a warm and friendly greeting from a gentleman

who frequents the center from time to time.

He gave me a great big smile and warm handshake, and then we had a wonderful conversation about what was going on in his life. He talked about dancing, his close relationships

with his daughters who live here in Sheridan, gardening and his friends.

We were finishing up our conversation, and as I was about to leave he added some parting advice for me in my life journey — "stay away from grumpy people!"

Oh, so he must have heard about the study "Happiness is Contagious."

No, he hadn't heard anything in the news about this, it is just how he chose to live his life. Spend time around people who are happy and you will do all right he said.

Here sitting before me was the proof! Erwin is 96 years of age, soon to be 97 in January!

So if this research is indeed true in its most basic form — happiness is



**Center  
Stage**

Carmen  
Rideout



contagious and it is good for our health — what should we do with this information?

Work at the Senior Center is definitely a people business. With over 80 employees, 450

volunteers and close to 2,000 customers, we see people in many different life situations.

I am constantly amazed and in admiration of the strength and resilience of the human spirit even in the most difficult times. "People are just as happy as they make up their minds to be," said Abraham Lincoln.

Helen, one of our diners, a volunteer and one of the happiest people around, states she makes a conscious decision to wake up each day and be happy. The alternative just doesn't work for her.

Many of you may be familiar with this story a Cherokee grandfather tells his grandson. It hangs on my bulletin board, and I think it fits here:

"Two wolves live inside me. One

is the bad wolf, full of greed and laziness, full of anger and jealousy and regret. The other is the good wolf, full of joy and compassion and willingness and a great love for the world.

"All the time, these wolves are fighting inside me."

"But, grandfather," the boy said. "Which wolf will win?"

The grandfather answered, "The one I feed."

Personally, I absolutely want to have a positive effect on the people I love and spend time with (note to self). Professionally, I can assure that this is part of the center's mission and that it (i.e., happiness, joy, peace, comfort, friendship, love) is palpably "felt" when you walk in the door.

So even if you're not feeling so good when you walk in the door, you feel at least a bit better when you leave.

*Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.*

*Carmen Rideout is executive director for the Sheridan Senior Center.*