

How do baby boomers affect Sheridan?

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It is demographically imperative to pay attention to this group. It has been commanding attention as it has moved through life, impacting school populations, employment, housing, health care, and now, retirement.

The United States will move from about 35 million persons 65-plus to 78 million by 2030.

The two “waves” of boomers — first wave (those born 1946-1954) and second wave (those born 1955-1964) — form a population group that will more than double the aging population in the next two decades.

All generations are subject to cohort distinctions that relate to the cultural, historical, economic and environmental influences that shape a generation.

The total boomer generation spans the death of a president, Vietnam War, civil rights struggles, growth of technology and other pivotal events seared into the collective memory.

It is more diverse than any other generation, well and ill (many of each!), wealthy and poor, active and

couch potatoes alike.

Boomers are generally better educated, have more opportunities to recreate, travel, and enjoy life, and have spent much of their adult lives consuming, indulging, and experiencing life on their own terms.

Baby boomers also give of themselves freely; Wyoming boomers, for example, donated an average of 58 hours annually to volunteer activity, 10 percent higher than the national average.

Wyoming is the eighth highest-ranking state in boomer volunteering.

The University of Wyoming study of Casper boomers gained much insight with all the dynamics of the boomer generation. It showed most that boomers still work, and almost half plan to work part time after retirement.

About 25 percent have no family to help them, and they have limited social support. Twenty-five percent of the boomers studied are caregivers

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themselves. One-third have chronic health conditions, and almost half report few leisure activities.

With the first wave of boomers well on their way to turning 60, most do not expect to retire: Some cannot afford to, others want to keep

working. Some will work intermittently or have several part-time jobs or even change careers.

Whether their work is paid or volunteer, they want it to be meaningful, focused and productive. In short, they will redefine “retirement.”

What does this mean for Sheridan, Wyo.? Sheridan must plan for multi-generations; many boomers still have parents with needs, children and grandchildren.

There will be an impact throughout the community on services, design (livable community features), safety, and businesses.

It is important that we provide opportunities for them to become life-long learners, continue to make a contribution, and stay involved in the community.

Sheridan needs to provide variety, options, choices and flexibility when providing services to this next wave of up-and-coming seniors.

The board of directors at the Sheridan Senior Center is right on target in wanting to know more about this generation as it develops its strategic long-term plan for the organization.

It is clear, however, that developing a plan on how the community will care and support this next generation of elders is bigger than one organization. The entire community needs to be involved.

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Silver Threads is a weekly column written by people who are involved with the Sheridan Senior Center.