

Mary Craft deserves to be thanked

Hundreds of us are sorry to see Mary Kraft hang up her pen. Her Silver Threads columns in the Sheridan Press have been a delight - a little history, a little personal reflection, and always a pat on the back for the good work of the senior programs. Many readers know her from her stories of cowboys, cooking, ranching, and a Nebraska childhood - and those squirrels - the embodiment of her wacky imagination combined with some clever political and social satire. But I want to tell you about the Mary Kraft who may not be known to her readers.

Think of a better-looking mixture of Julia Child, Mother Theresa, and Mark Twain, with just a touch of Attila the Hun. Mary was with the new Senior Meals Program under the sponsorship of The Salvation Army when I was hired as the director of the Senior Citizens Coordinating Council in 1978. She had started as a cook for Senior Meals and soon was tapped by Salvation Army Captain, Murray Flagg, to become the director. Under her leadership the meals were expanded to five sites throughout the county. Here in Sheridan County we were just starting to understand that as the population

Silver Threads

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escalating costs, elderly people were often living in terrible ramshackle apartments. Within six months we combined meals and transportation under the sponsorship of the Senior Citizens Coordinating Council, and Mary headed up and developed outreach services.

If you're wondering what outreach services are, believe me we were wondering too, and there was no guidebook; but Mary took kindness, practical solutions, a little laughter, and a lot of perseverance and she

became more mobile, adult children, the traditional support for older people, were often missing. In addition there was a housing shortage, and because their fixed incomes had not allowed them to pay for the

reached out to start helping older people. Her reputation for effectiveness and integrity made her a trusted contact for the elderly as well as their doctors, lawyers, pastors, out of town family, friends and neighbors. She called on folks in their homes to see how they were getting along, helped them get services, went with them to doctor's appointments, worked with them to fill out insurance, Medicare, and tax refund forms and became an expert in many areas. She implemented the HUD rental subsidy program for elderly and disabled and worked with landlords to provide decent apartments for people with low incomes.

In her 20 years with the senior programs, Mary Kraft set a tone of service and respect for older people, which shines from Sheridan County's senior programs to this day. What a woman! Thanks, Mary. Your community is proud of you and I'm proud to call you my friend.

Ky Dixon volunteers at the Sheridan Senior Center Development Committee, and is past executive director of the senior center. Silver Threads is a weekly column written by people involved with the senior center.