

## **BREAKFAST EXCHANGE CLUB**

BECON

February 23, 2024

### **No Guests.**

### **Announcements.**

- We are the host city for the District Convention May 3-4. Mark your calendar and be a part of the festivities! Sponsorships are available for anyone who wants to help bring Erin Merryn from IL to town as the keynote to help us promote Erin's Law – a childhood sexual assault training for the schools.
- Craig reminded members that elections of new officers is coming up. There are 3 Board positions and 2 BEC Foundation board positions available. Nominations will start in March.
- Shawnee reminded us that plans are underway for a fundraiser to support Amber Parish on 3/14 at the Legion. 5-8 volunteers are needed to help serve food in the kitchen. Or just show up and support Amber and the event!
- A \$5k grant from the Food Truck Battle proceeds was presented to Bill Kennedy for Yellowstone National Cemetery. Bill gave an overview of the upcoming events, including a Vietnam Vet tribute in March. The money is used to buy service flags. Interesting fact: the because of the high winds in Laurel, the flags only last 6 weeks and need to be replaced often,

### **Unfinished Business.**

- There was a second membership vote (of three) for the approval of a \$10k grant to Veterans Navigation Network. Per the Bylaws, membership approval is required for this one since it exceeds the amount that can be automatically authorized.
- Membership Dues – There is a need to raise dues. (See last week's BECON for details). Craig will be sending out more info and hopes to modify the dues amount for Q2.

### **Guest Speaker – Patti Webster/Homefront (Billings Housing Authority).**

- Billings Housing Authority changed its name to Homefront in 2018. They aren't a federal, state or county program. They are a public entity – their own municipality. They did establish a 501c3 component to be able to seek additional funding to support the government funded programs.
- They provide a variety of housing services in the city of Billings and a 10-mile radius.
- Housing is a public health crisis.
- They serve 2,018 families daily primarily through housing choice vouchers (800) and State of MT vouchers (725). Their program focuses on the working poor. 7,000 people are on the wait list. Interesting fact: of the 2,018 people served, only 2% are on welfare.
- Most poor people are paying 30-50% of their income for housing. "It's expensive to be poor."
- They have several undeveloped pieces of property and are just waiting for the right time for a particular project. These pieces of property are scattered all over town. They recently purchased 30 units at Laurel Gardens. They have also recently sold 58 3-4 bedroom houses and will only focus on 1-2 bedrooms as they are in higher demand.
- One of their completed projects has 455 units and 216 are considered public housing.
- An upcoming project will be a portion of a subdivision in the Heights with 1-2 bedroom affordable homes created using 3-D printing with cement style material. Homefront will be the first in the state of MT to introduce this type of construction. They will also work with the school district's career center to train students how to operate the printer. Once construction starts, they will have a webcam for people to watch how the houses are made.
- They are also recycling and re-using the Man Camp trailers to housing pods, which will transition 218 trailers to 101 2-bedroom housing pods. They will have a zero-utility footprint, and all will be fully accessible. This will also be in the Heights.
- Program services to help educate their clients on financial choices and other community resources is an important component of their work.
- Homefront has its own maintenance team, and they are starting a home maintenance training program for program participants.
- Other types of housing support: victims of domestic violence, homeless, and family reunification.

- Patti is a founding member of the state's Continuum of Care and has been the chair of Yellowstone's Continuum of Care coalition. She highlighted the work around Covid and low barrier shelters for the past several years during winter. HRDC and United Way are the biggest partners with Homefront in the coalition. The low barrier shelter provided 3,675 shelter nights to 417 unique individuals. The CoC has visited Boise to explore implementing a similar permanent supportive housing program in Billings.
- Patti has been with Homefront for 31 ½ years.
- Patti and Al highlighted past Club support of Homefont: from recreation and transportation for kids living in housing programs to go to camp, to a police officer in a particular neighborhood. We have also supported sending kids to a Harlem Globetrotters game and a day at Big Bear. Recently, a grant from the Food Truck Battle helped them with the Veteran's diversion fund for rental assistance and providing basic household items.

**50/50 Raffle.**

- Mike S won!

Respectfully submitted,  
Kim Lewis