



Thompson Center on **LOURDES**

BY GREG BELL

For decades the Thompson Senior Center in downtown Appleton provided a welcome service to the area's aging adult population until a rather sudden closing in early spring 2016. It was heartbreaking for a significant portion of Fox Cities seniors, who were left in the lurch without the place that had become so much a part of their lives. Fortunately, a small group of concerned citizens realized the vacuum closing the senior

center would create and immediately launched an effort to relocate.

By April 2016, nearly all activities were reinstated at the new Thompson Center on Lourdes (TCoL), hosted in a former elementary school on the St. Bernadette Parish Center campus. TCoL agreed on a five-year renewable lease that allowed for the new senior center to plan for the future as they recruited

an advisory board of directors, hired staff, and everything else they'd need for long-term success. The new 501(c)(3) nonprofit certification was granted in May 2018. Fundraising has been very successful through a very generous group of individuals, foundations, and corporations.

We can now report that TCoL has over 2,000 patrons that use the venue annually,



and that number continues to grow. In a collaboration initiative with St. Paul Elder Services, TCoL launched operation Thompson Community Services in July 2018, an outreach program designed to deliver a social serving ministry to seniors vulnerable to the hardships associated with aging and potential difficulties of living independently in private homes. The mission is dedicated to aiding in the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of our older adult population. Staff and volunteers share their passion for the mission and will be providing a comfortable, educational, social, and recreational environment that strives to empower and enrich the lives of community elders while enhancing their personal growth.

The story of TCoL is good people and good ideas merging to repurpose unused spaces to provide a real



community need: giving older adults a place where they have the freedom to express ideas, share stories, and explore their creativity. It's also a place that helps keep our elders from falling into isolation and depression. We are here as a home away from home to help lift their spirits so they can enjoy life to the fullest. True that in Wisconsin it's not uncommon for people to come together and do great things, but when people come together to build community, it's always a good story to tell.

Photographs provided by TCoL.

Greg Bell is board vice president of TCoL.



THOMPSON CENTER ON LOURDES

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