

Mar 2011 - Journal Pioneer - Council chair defends investment in people

By Eric McCarthy

O'LEARY - A municipality can't be concerned solely with things like sidewalks and sewers, O'Leary Community Council chair Nancy Wallace told residents attending the annual ratepayers meeting earlier this week.

"There also has to be an investment in the people," she said.

Wallace didn't get any argument from residents on that point, but some did question council on the discrepancy between revenue and expenditures on the operation of the Alice Duncan Intergenerational Centre.

The centre recorded \$5,258 in revenue last year while expenditures totaled \$46,811.

"It was never built as a money-making entity; it was built as an intergenerational centre," Wallace reminded residents.

She said the community has been commended by the RCMP's youth outreach worker for the interest it takes in the area's youth.

The centre, she said is utilized by youth, seniors and Community Inclusions and it is also available for rentals.

Wallace noted there are lots of other examples where the community invests in programs without a promise of a financial return. She listed contributions to the sports centre and curling club, the building of a lighted walking track as well as tax incentives for development.

"We are an attractive community because of what we do," said vice-chair Dana Harris .

"Recreation is important," Stanley MacDonald acknowledged, but added, "I think ratepayers would want you to control expenses."

Ratepayers, however, suggested there might be ways to narrow the gap between revenue and expenditures, such as relocating the office of the community's recreation director to the ADIC and enlisting area seniors to serve as volunteers to reduce employee costs.

Denton Ellis suggested an enticement, such as a break on taxation, might help attract more volunteers.

Wallace was reluctant to turn the operation over to volunteers, pointing out that centres in communities where that was tried fell flat. Volunteer burn-out is a concern, she said.

She said council can certainly look at ways of improving the revenue figure, but she said she can't see the ADIC ever becoming "break-even."

There will be a reduction in costs in future years, though. Council will make the final payment of \$2,050 on the building's mortgage this year. The building was valued at \$150,000.