

Pool

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groundswell of support led to the March formation of Friends of the Wakonda Pool.

The organization tackled the pool's three major problems: cost, lack of lifeguards and lack of use.

"To raise money, we sold 145 memberships to Friends of the Wakonda Pool and had a successful fundraiser in May," she said. "We raised enough money to give the Town of Wakonda \$12,500 to supplement their costs for opening the pool."

The Friends organization turned to the Wakonda High School Alumni Association's mailing list for selling the \$75 memberships, Sharples said. Response came from across the nation.

"We were flooded with responses from California, Colorado, New York, Nebraska and Iowa," she said. "People were sending stories about, 'I remember the pool!' and 'I learned to swim at the pool! You can't close the pool!'"

With the finances secured for now, the Friends turned their attention to other needs, Sharples said.

"We helped recruit lifeguards and now have six working," she said. "We are manning the poolhouse this summer with volunteers, and we have started selling concessions."

As for the lack of pool use, the Friends organization has helped attract much larger crowds, Sharples said.

"The record attendance include 131 people one day, whereas the pool used to average about 50," she said. "Many days, we draw 70 to 80 people, but it's not crowded."

The Friends literally recruited swimmers by advertising the pool, selling more season passes and working with the neighboring town of Irene to set up a bus bringing 30 to 35 youngsters twice a week.

The cooperative effort with Irene shows the Wakonda pool's importance to surrounding communities, Steffen said.

"Irene doesn't have a pool, Volin doesn't have a pool, Volin doesn't," he said. "There are a lot of towns around us that are coming here, and it's been real good."

The Wakonda pool also draws on area communities for lifeguards, Sharples said.

"We had people who kicked in some incentives and found six lifeguards. We have one from Volin, one from Irene and four from Wakonda," she said. "These kids weren't certified as lifeguards, so we went to work and got them certification."

By securing lifeguards, the Wakonda pool could offer another valuable service, Steffen said.

"I always thought a big thing was offering swimming lessons," he said. "We have a really good turnout of 70 kids this year for lessons. This has been one of the best years. It's been great."

Wakonda also keeps the pool affordable by holding down the admission cost, Sharples said. Swimmers can pay \$2 a day or purchase the season pass which was kept at the same price, she said.

"We were talking about raising the season pass to the \$75 level. But the town board was very adamant that they didn't want us to increase the cost of the season pass," she said. "The town believes (the pool) should be accessible to everyone, and they wanted to keep the cost low."

The Wakonda pool also remains open nearly all the time, closing only in case of lightning or other safety-related reasons, Sharples said.

"We are always open, even on cool days," she said. "There were days in June when it was pretty cool for a week, but we had 20 kids in the pool."

The Wakonda pool holds a history of improvements and efforts to keep it open, Sharples said.

The bathhouse was built during the 1930s by relief workers who landscaped the park. The construction was completed in June 1934. After the state condemned the pool in 1961, residents raised money and in 1965 re-opened it. The cement pool was built in 1965.

Cornstock's arrival has raised tens of thousands of dollars for the pool and park, Sharples said. The funds have brought improvements such as expanding the deck, purchasing lounge chairs and maintaining the filter house, she said.

The 11th annual Cornstock will take place July 30 at the Wakonda park and pool, beginning at 11 a.m. and running until midnight.

The outdoor festival will feature sporting events, a poker run, live entertainment, the Little Miss Cornstock contest, a children's carnival featuring bounce houses and 14 games, a beer gar-



COURTESY PHOTO

Swimmers of all ages enjoy a cool, refreshing dip in the Wakonda pool. Area residents, with the help of supporters from across the nation, have kept the pool open after the town's board of trustees had planned not to open it this year for lack of finances, usage and lifeguards.

den and food. The live music, beginning at 6 p.m., features Midnight Special, Wild Card and the

Gullikson Brothers. The celebration has been brought back from its one-year

hiatus for several reasons, according to Sharples. "We decided to take on the

challenge of organizing Cornstock because we didn't want to see the celebration die," she said. "Every community needs a celebration, and Cornstock has been a fantastic event in Wakonda for a decade. We just hope we can throw as good of an event as our predecessors did."

Most of the people involved with the original Cornstock have retired from helping with the celebration, so it's a new crowd organizing this year's festival.

"All proceeds from Cornstock will go to the Friends of the Wakonda Pool and will be used to keep the pool in operation next year and for many years, we hope," Sharples said.

Cornstock, along with this year's membership drive and the sale of season passes, has drawn attention to the park and pool, Sharples said.

"We have received a lot of compliments from people. They say Wakonda's pool is a hidden treasure," she said. "We are very proud of our town. The pool is a real asset, and people felt like this is one of our crown jewels. If we lose our pool, then the town loses its character and can also lose its people."

Friends of the Wakonda Pool

will remain in operation for the long haul, Sharples said. The organization has assured the town that it will provide half of the pool's financial needs, and it has already received enough money to keep going, she said.

"Our organization is here to stay," she said. "It's our mission to keep the pool open. We have done far too much work — we aren't going to let it go after just a year or two."

Steffen expressed a mixture of pride and amazement at the response shown by his town and other supporters.

"We will have a pretty good thing going, if the pool can keep going like it has been," he said. "(People) really recruited and turned things around. It shows the importance of community involvement, not just us three guys on the board (of trustees)."

The Friends' success shows what happens when people fight for a cause they hold dear, Sharples said.

"We have totally revitalized the pool," she said. "It's clear this is something the public cares greatly about keeping open. It's been phenomenal."

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