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The topper goes into place completing the work of installing the Liberal Senior Center's new LED display sign in front of the center Thursday afternoon. The installation brought an end to many months of planning and preparation for the project to replace an outdated sign. L&T photo/Robert Pierce

Senior center replaces old events sign with state-of-the-art digital one

By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times In 2012, officials with the Liberal Senior Center began plans for acquiring a new sign to display events taking place at the facility during the week. "Officially, it was October when she gave me the OK that I could start raising money," said activities director Michele Stoddard referring to executive director Susan Roberts. "I wanted to start in July."

Stoddard explained some of the limitations of the sign that was originally in place at the center.

"With the old sign, we could only put the top three items for the week," she said. "With this one, we can put what's going on every day. I feel it's going to really help us communicate better with the seniors and the community itself."

Eventually, the Southwest Kansas weather took its toll on the sign, and it was removed to make room for a new one.

Thursday, workers with Liberal's Visual Signs installed a new LED sign where that original had been, and Roberts said the new display device was an idea whose time had come. "We'd been talking about this for a long time," she said. "The old sign got to be so hard. It was actually dangerous. We began talking about it, and Michele and Shannon began looking up companies."

Stoddard next researched and talked to local companies before finding LED Craft Inc., an Internet company based in Missouri which works with non-profit organizations. She said the new sign can now be used in addition to a news nuggets bulletin the activities director prints weekly to keep seniors up to date on the center's events.

"We use our nuggets for the seniors that come in and pick them up and let them know we use the newspaper to print it for us," she said. "Our sign was another way to talk up, but the old sign was only allowing us to do the top three items for the week."

Obviously, with more than three events happening every week, the former sign was simply not doing the job anymore, and Stoddard said the new display item will allow events to be posted daily.

"Before I leave, I can put the next day's activities on," she said. "When we've got something really special coming we want to advertise, we can use that fourth line to say, 'Don't forget we've got Retired Teachers coming in,' or 'A guest speaker is coming in from the Rape Crisis center.' We're just trying to make sure we keep people informed."

Roberts said in addition to daily posting of activities, the new sign has many capabilities.

"We can put graphics on there," she said. "We do colors. We can do anything we want to. It'll all be new to get into the electronics of it and see how we're actually going to get it all done. It will sure be an asset to our programming and our important meetings that we have. It will also be a great way to show it off."

Stoddard said LED Craft officials are confident that the new sign will hold up to whatever Southwest Kansas weather can throw at it.

"Everybody assured me that the weather will not take a toll on this easily," she said. "In the beginning, they started having trouble, but they have gone in have fixed the problems over time. They have guaranteed me that this will last for quite a while."

Stoddard said having the convenience of changing the sign from her office comes in handy, particularly when there are inclement weather conditions outside.

"If something happens and the weather's getting bad and we've got to close the center, I can put 'Closed due to weather,' and it'll go on the sign," she said.

"It'll be a dream," Roberts said. "We're just excited, really excited, and I have to compliment Michele on the hard work. She raised all the money for it. That was all her project to do, and she did it well."

Stoddard said a new sign also better helps keep people from outside of the center updated on what is happening.

“We really need to make sure we’re staying out and letting the community know what’s going on,” she said. “The sign is another good tool for us to be able to tell people. Hopefully, it’ll bring out more awareness.”

As it is designed to promote, Stoddard believes the sign will do the best job possible.

“I want people to be able to know what’s going on, and I feel this is a great way for me to be able to show them what’s going on,” she said.

The cost of the new sign, which included a permit from the City of Liberal, shipping and installment, came to nearly \$14,000. To pay that cost, many donations were received from the community, including William and Leona Scantlin, J&R Sand, Cary Utz, Stu Emmert’s, Chrysler Corner, Lucille Sawyer, Southwest Glass & Door, Liberal Office Machines, Mortgages Unlimited, Lyddons, Rash Oil, Sunflower Bank, Elite Motors, Jonny and Maria Byrum, Byron Bird & Associates, Happy Steppers and Pizza Hut.

Stoddard said the center’s old sign was good for the time it which it was used, but she agreed with Roberts, saying a new display device was needed for today’s communication needs.

“It was a good sign at one time,” she said. “At the time they got it, I think it was a great opportunity for the center. I think now, we can upgrade it to be an even better tool for the center.”

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