
Editorial

Whitney Benefits

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Let it be stated up front, Whitney Benefits has done, and continues to do, wonderful things to enrich the lives of Sheridan County residents and the quality of life in Sheridan County.

The Whitney group's donation of tens of millions of dollars for facilities or programs at Sheridan County YMCA and Sheridan College over the years is well known.

But there's been a change over the past few years, and that change is something that Whitney should make clear to the residents who, in theory, are the benefactors of the group's millions of dollars.

This past Wednesday was the formal dedication of the Whitney Commons Park, located next to the Sheridan YMCA.

Last week, Whitney announced it had purchased the middle school in Sheridan from Sheridan County School District 2.

Also within the past three years Whitney:

- Purchased the former RENEW building on Broadway;

- Purchased the property north of the middle school and built the Whitney Community Ice Rink;

- Purchased the MDU Building on North Brooks Street;

- Purchased the "Hallmark" building on Main Street next to the WYO Theater.

There has not been much in the way of public questioning of the above purchases, other than queries by Sheridan Press staff, which have not yielded any clear information or direction.

But ponder this scenario.

Say a wealthy land developer from California moved to Sheridan three years ago and started buying up all this real estate.

The developer, being a private individual (as Whitney is a private, nonprofit group), does not have to make his plans known.

But since this developer is "from out of town" and does not have the local history and connection Whitney enjoys, would he be spared the community's interest or skepticism over what he plans to do with all of the above real estate?

And what purchases and plans are in the future?

Back to reality.

Has anyone heard from the Whitney group what it plans to do with all the assets and real estate it has purchased in the past few years?

Has anyone from the general public been able to give input on what these assets should be used for?

Does anyone know what this financial juggernaut's plans are for shaping the future of Sheridan and Sheridan County, and what effect it will have on the livelihoods of the people who live and work here?

One can take the view that historically Whitney and the people who run it have been benevolent benefactors who have remained out of sight — letting the financial resources of Whitney Benefits do all the talking.

One can assume that the people who run Whitney have the community's best interest at heart, both in the near term and 20 years down the road.

But being an American with a belief in the system of checks and balances, we cannot help being skeptical.

The public cannot attend a Whitney Benefits board meeting.

We have asked¹ to attend but have not received an invitation.

We are just curious, and that curiosity will not wane as long as there are questions about what Whitney's plans are for this community.

With no input possible, we can only trust that the people who run Whitney have the community's best interest at heart.

There is no way to know, because there is no way to find out this information when the Whitney Board itself does not provide clarity.

We just hope the checks written from the balance in the Whitney Benefits fortune will continue to enhance the wonderful way of life we Sheridan County residents enjoy.

Without clarity of direction from the Whitney group, one can only hope.

Here are the current trustees at Whitney Benefits:

Tom Kinnison, president;

Roy Garber, vice president;

Kim Love, treasurer;

Tom Belus, secretary;

Trustees — Val Burgess, Jack Chase, Mary Ellen McWilliams, Pete Schoonmaker, Sam Scott, John Smith, Tim Tarver, David Withrow and Maureen Humphrys.