

2025 Annual Report



North Fork Senior Connections

Finding Solutions to Help Seniors Age in Place

P.O. Box 1738 Paonia, CO 81428

“North Fork Senior Connections exists to ensure that, as we age, we do so with connection, dignity, and purpose. We support older adults in the North Fork Valley by offering opportunities for meaningful engagement, personal growth, and the ability to age in place in community.”

Dear Friends,

What an amazing year! With staffing changes and Paonia Senior Center and North Fork Senior Connection becoming one, we certainly have had our challenges this year. But, with the support of both boards, we believe we have created a strong union. We are thrilled to welcome our new Program Manager, Jean Berman and Operations Manager, Jessica Ott, who are working together to get the Centers in both Crawford and Paonia fine tuned.

We are truly grateful for the generosity of the North Fork Valley community this year. We have received many contributions for both the Paonia and Crawford Senior Center programs. And we also raised close to \$20,000 to match a Boettcher Foundation grant to upgrade the Paonia Senior Center facility. Your generosity is overwhelming

and much appreciated. Your support for our goal of helping senior age in their homes has been more than a blessing to so many.

Our goal as a board is to continue to support the senior community by providing meals, connection, services, and meaningful programming. Once again, thank you to all who have supported our transition and continue to encourage our future.

Wanda Gofforth
NFSC Board Chair



NFSC Board of Directors

In 2025 we said goodbye to long time board member **Bruce Woodside**, who has served as chair of the board for the past six years. Replacing Bruce on the board is **Betsy Marston**, a 50-year Paonia resident, local business owner and longtime journalist who edits the opinion service, *Writers on the Range*. She has served on the board of several nonprofits and brings to the board experience and fundraising skills.

The merger of NFSC with Paonia Senior Center brought two new members to our board, Paula Martin and Lindi Mereness. Both Paula and Lindi served on the Paonia Senior Center board and were an important part of the merger process.

Lindi Mereness is a half century resident of the North Fork Valley. After retiring from a career in nursing, she was the founding instructor for the popular SAIL program.

Paula Martin has lived, farmed and taught on the western slope for decades. Upon retiring from a career in education she has immersed herself in life in Paonia. She was the force behind revitalizing the Paonia Tree Board before becoming involved in the Paonia Senior Center. Continuing board members include:

Wanda Gofforth, former mayor of Crawford and the force behind the new Crawford Senior Center program. Wanda currently serves as chair of the board.

Bonnie Eisenberg worked for many years in the non-profit sector and has extensive experience on non-profit boards. Bonnie developed our Neighborly Rides program and has served as vice chair for the past three years. She is our grant writer and a member of the finance committee.

Brad Thacker is a retired software engineer



and former research chemist. He's been on the board for three years and has served as Treasurer for the past year and a half.

Mark Sullivant joined the board in late 2024, just in time to take over responsibility for the Paonia Senior Center as our Facility Manager. Mark has extensive experience in property management and public works, so you know he is one of those men who can fix anything.

Marsha Brezonick a Paonia native and long time real estate broker, has a long history of community service. Now in her fifth year on the NFSC board, Marsha brings exceptional leadership as chair of the fundraising committee.

Carol Thayer Jaques, spent many years as a news anchor in Washington, D.C. and then launched a second career as a mental health counselor. Carol joined the board in 2024 and has hosted several board retreats at her home. She is currently serving as staff liaison.

Board members are among the many volunteers who give hundreds of hours of their time and expertise to keep our organization strong and growing. Dedicated volunteers lead our programs, provide essential services for our neighbors, answer phones, set up and clean up for our lunch programs, keep us connected to the digital world, make building repairs, and many other important tasks. And, in addition to our gratitude, volunteers themselves are enriched by knowing they are contributing to the well being and quality of life for their neighbors and our wonderful community.

A Year of Changes and Challenges

North Fork Senior Connections was formed in 2019 to provide support services to seniors wishing to age in place. Our main program was Service Saturday, to help seniors with seasonal property maintenance tasks, such as raking leaves and washing windows. Paonia Senior Center provided office space for our staff and the two organizations worked cooperatively for several years, often sharing responsibility for senior center programs.

The Paonia Senior Center had been operated by a dedicated group of volunteers for over 40 years. Managing the senior center was handled by Lynne Bear and Bobbi Selk, two long time volunteers who gave many hours of their time to keep things running smoothly. However, both of these energetic women were in their 90s, and when Lynne turned 97, in 2024, she decided to retire. The position of board chair went to Linda McCone, also a dedicated volunteer, and 20 years younger.

In mid 2024, Linda approached the NFSC board with a proposal for a merger. Energy for running the senior center was waning among its board members, and she believed the time had come for a merger. The NFSC board resisted the idea at first, but when Linda announced she would be resigning from the board in January, 2025 (to move to Costa Rica), her urgency for a merger became apparent and the NFSC board agreed.

The merger process involved lawyers, accountants, a real estate title company, and many legal filings with county, state and federal agencies.

Each board chose a few members to form a merger committee, facilitated by a local non-profit consultant, Elaine Brett, to discuss how to proceed. It soon became clear that the best path forward to combine the two organizations was for the board of PSC to dissolve their non-profit,

turning over both ownership of the senior center building and their financial assets to NFSC. PSC board members who wanted to remain active were invited to join the NFSC board, and two of them did so. The merger process was complicated and involved lawyers, accountants, a real estate title company, and many legal filings with county, state and federal agencies. As the president of the senior center board, most of those tasks fell to Lindi Mereness.

Next 50, a Colorado foundation that supports senior serving non profits, gave NFSC an emergency grant of \$5,550 to cover all the necessary expenses. The grant also included money to hire a board development consultant, David Livingston, to help the newly combined board of directors come together as a team to chart our path forward.

Mark Sullivant, who has extensive experience in property management agreed to take on the role of Facility Manager. Mark's willingness to assume responsibility for the upkeep of the senior center building alleviated what had been the major concern of the NFSC board. The merger process was successfully completed by May 1, 2025 and everyone breathed a sign of relief.

Neighborly Rides

Sometimes, when a program runs really well, it is easily overlooked. But our Neighborly Rides program deserves a shout out. Now in its third year, we have 12 active volunteers who drive seniors to medical appointments, shopping trips, and other important errands. In 2025, we provided 70+ rides to 15 seniors for a total of well over 3,000 miles. This kind of service helps many seniors who cannot drive to remain in their homes. So, thank you to Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHAFA) for underwriting this important program.

Paonia Senior Center Renewal

While the merger between NFSC and Paonia Senior Center was still in process, we applied to the Boettcher Foundation for a grant to add a wheelchair accessible restroom to the senior center and to renovate the kitchen. In June, we were notified that we had been awarded a \$10,000 grant, on the condition that we match the funds with another \$10,000 to be raised from the local community. They gave us one year to raise the matching funds.

A fundraising committee was formed, headed by long time board member Marsha Brezonick. A plan was drawn up to raise the \$10,000 and maybe more. Our Press releases were published in local media, the campaign was discussed on KVNF, and several major donors were approached to contribute. Much to our surprise, in less than a month of launching the fundraising drive, we raised the \$10,000 needed to get the grant from Boettcher foundation.



In November, we held a successful fundraising event, “An Evening in Paris,” to raise additional funds for the building project. Fiona’s, a lovely local cocktail lounge, donated the venue for the event. Several local businesses, including Dependable Lumber, Paonia Farm and Home, and Don’s Market, sponsored the event, donating food and money to cover all our expenses. The lively, gypsy jazz entertainment was provided by Girdie and the Ghost Peppers Jazz band - who donated their talent as well. Tickets for the event quickly sold out, and a fabulous time was had by all. Donations continued to come

in and by the end of the year, our building fund grew to just over \$30,000.

“It is so heartwarming to see the positive response to our fundraising efforts and to feel the support of our community for the senior center.”

Once actual planning for the renovation began, we learned that the apartment attached to the senior center was going to be vacated soon and it has a very nice ADA bathroom, which we can now use. So now we will be able to use the money raised to replace the front and back doors, as required for ADA compliance, and renovate the kitchen to make it more usable for our meal programs.



We want to extend a heart felt thank you for the generous contributions of our supporting donors: Trish Meyers, Judy Briscoe, Betsy Marston, Bruce Woodside, Mark and Jeannette Sullivan, Town of Paonia, Lynn Mattingly, Linda McCone, David and Sheila Torkelson, Paula Martin, Bronwen Barry, Holly Bidle, Connie Hodges, Donna Littlefield, Eileen Milvenan, Emily Sinclair, Terry Smith and Brad Thacker. Thank you also to the many community members, too numerous to list here, who gave what they could to ensure the success of the Paonia Senior Center renovation project.

Crawford Senior Center



In the spring of 2024, when Wanda Gofforth completed her term as Mayor of Crawford, she joined our board and jumped right on the task of organizing the Crawford community to create a senior center program. Many local organizations enthusiastically supported the venture, and in June a senior center program was launched, utilizing the meeting room at the Crawford Community Church. Using the model of the popular Thursday lunches at the Paonia Senior Center, and working closely with the Boardwalk and other local restaurants, a subsidized, catered lunch program is now offered for Crawford seniors on the first and third Wednesdays of every month. The program usually includes an engaging speaker, music or some other kind of group activity following the lunch. The community response has been overwhelming and we are thrilled to welcome 30- 40 seniors to every lunch program.

Crawford based organizations contributing to the establishment of the Crawford Senior Center include: Town of Crawford, Friends of the Town Hall, Pioneer Days Committee, Fruitland Mesa Club, Pioneer Days Melodrama, and Needle Rock Club. We also received a \$1500 grant for the project from Region 10, and significant donations from John Patton, Tony Vervloct and Collenette Elise Corson, Orville and Shirley Cotton, Kathy Steckel (NFEMS) and Liz Hendrik (Needle Rock Realty).

Building Community Through Service

Twice a year, in Spring and Autumn, NFSC publicizes and holds “Service Saturdays” in Paonia, Hotchkiss and Crawford. Spring chores include yard work, cleaning gutters, activating swamp coolers, and washing windows. Autumn chores include those but removing swamp coolers, and raking leaves. NFSC encourages and invites families, school kids, and anyone who wants to help, to sign up in advance. Seniors who need help call our office to sign up, noting what work is needed at their home. This past autumn, about 40 volunteers helped almost 50 senior households.

On the day of each event, volunteers meet at a central location for coffee and delicious baked goods provided by additional volunteers. Teams are formed, typically focusing on one of the activities (window washing, gutter cleaning, etc.) and head off with a list of locations. People who didn’t know each other make new friends as they work together helping their neighbors. It’s an uplifting event. NFSC staff is available to make sure all is going smoothly. Pizza is ordered and picked up so that after about 3 hours of work (approximately 9:30-12:30) volunteers meet back together, tell stories and enjoy pizza.

Beyond the immediate physical labor, Service Saturdays weave a lasting social fabric across the North Fork Valley. By bringing together diverse generations—from energetic students to seasoned retirees—the event transforms simple chores into opportunities for meaningful connection. These shared efforts break down barriers of isolation, fostering a profound sense of belonging and mutual reliance that strengthens the entire community long after the last leaf is raked.

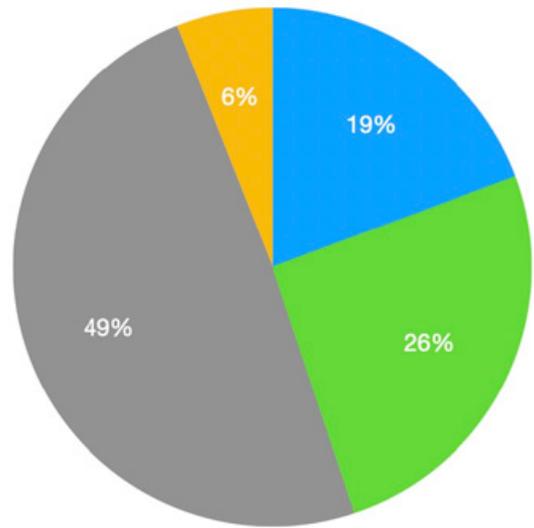
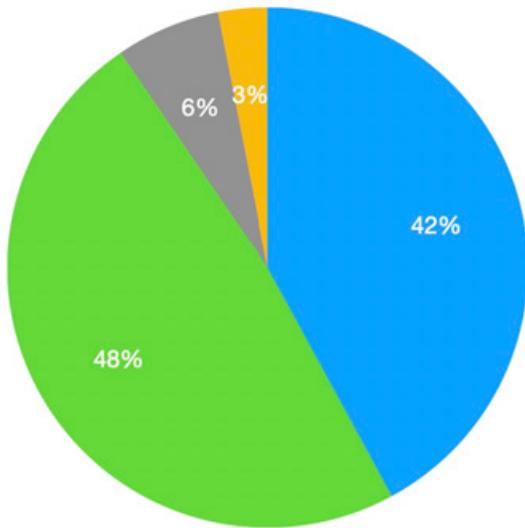
All You Need is Love...and Money

The programs and services provided by North Fork Senior Connections are possible only because of the hundreds of hours of volunteer time and expertise contributed by local seniors...a true labor of love. We appreciate you all so very much; we would not exist without you.

Financially, we are supported primarily by donations from individuals and organizations in our community, program fees, and grants from several Colorado Foundations.

Here is where our money came from in 2025, and how it was spent.

● Donations ● Grants ● Program fees ● Other income ● Operations ● Programs ● Staff Wages ● Building Expenses



In addition to the local restaurants who provide delicious food for our senior meals programs, (listed elsewhere) North Fork Senior Connections and the two senior center programs we manage, are supported by many donations, in-kind and financial, from local businesses and organizations. We are grateful for your support. Thank you to: **Mountain Oven, Bower Coffee, Uproot, Paonia Storage, High Country Printing and Graphics, Delicious Orchards/Big Bs, Valley Organic Lunch Program for Seniors, Kids Pasta Project, Surface Creek Senior Citizens, Hotchkiss Elks, North Fork Valley Chamber of Commerce, LDS Church, Nu Vista CU, Needlerock Mountain Realty, and North Fork Ambulance Auxiliary.**

This past year we have received generous grants from several Colorado foundations, which have supported our programs and reinforced our organization for long term sustainability: **Next 50, Boettcher Foundation, El Pomar Foundation, Rocky Mountain Health Foundation, Dave and Mary Wood Fund /Western Colorado Community Foundation and the Colorado Housing and Finance authority.**





Delicious, Nutritious, and Oh-So-Fun - Thursday Lunches at Paonia Senior Center

With the merger completed, North Fork Senior Connections proudly took over responsibility for the Thursday Lunch program, offered in collaboration with local restaurants and caterers. Tremendous thanks to those providing mouth-watering meals for our seniors in 2025: AP Catering, Berg Harvest, Chick-a-Pea, Chrys Bailey, Clemie Bouton, Flying Fork, Rio Bravo, and Sweetgrass Paonia.

Although diners don't know the menu ahead of time, everyone has their favorite caterers, and reservations often fill up quickly. Diners call in their reservation the week prior, or use the sign-up sheet at the Senior Center. Bobbie Selk and Kathy Baes have developed an efficient system for taking reservations; people may request gluten-free, dairy-free, and vegetarian options. Margit Yates heads the volunteer crew, often joined by Judy Anderson, Bonnie Quinn, Lynn Wetherell, Loretta Small, Ken Klatt, and others. These wonderful volunteers set up the tables and chairs, serve the food and clean up afterward! Bobbie Selk sits by the front door, welcoming diners, checking them off the list, and collecting their donation. NFSC generally pays the caterer \$12 per diner, and in 2025, this program was partially subsidized by generous donors, so diners were requested to donate \$6. Some people donate a little more.

Each lunch typically brings together 30-40 diners, filling the room with laughter, conversation, and the irresistible aroma of great food. Old and new friends enjoy the time together, and many linger. By providing a welcoming space to gather, this program serves as a vital antidote to the isolation that many older adults face. These weekly lunches transform a simple meal into a cornerstone of community health, ensuring that participants receive the high-quality nutrition they need while effectively combating loneliness through regular, meaningful social interaction. Shared mealtimes have a profound impact, often encouraging better dietary intake and higher spirits than eating alone, which is essential for maintaining independence and overall well-being. In 2026, North Fork Senior Connections remains committed to this dual mission: nourishing the bodies of our neighbors with delicious locally-catered food and feeding their spirits with the warmth of a shared 7 table.

*Printed by High Country Printing and Graphics
Digital print production by John Valentine on Adobe InDesign*

North Fork Senior Connections 970-527-3482 nfseniorconnections@gmail.com
website: <https://nfseniorconnections.org>

New Faces and Renewed Energy

Shortly after our merger with PSC was completed, we were saddened to learn that both our long time program manager, Laura Lee Yates, and Faye Sullivan, our operations manager, were planning to leave those positions within a few months. Laura Lee, the backbone of our organization for many years, was more than ready to retire and Faye had become pregnant and would soon need to redirect her energy to her growing family.

Although we are a very small community, we were lucky to find experienced people to fill those positions. In fact, Jean Berman, an experienced hospice manager, was living right across the street from the senior center. Jean has many years of experience working for senior serving non-profits and was a perfect choice for the Program Manager job. Jessica Ott, who also has years of experience working with seniors, and the administrative skills we need, was hired as

Operations Manager. With our new staff in place, we are confident about the future direction and sustainability of North Fork Senior Connections and the two senior centers we now administer.

