

# —Relationships—

## The Good Neighbor Club

Where every day is a good neighbor day!

*by Deb Seminary*

**Dakota Community Bank** is out to make sure the communities they serve are happy ones. Since April 2007, they have been helping people make new friends and experience entertaining adventures with their Good Neighbor Club (GNC).

The GNC is for people 50 and older who have an account at Dakota Community Bank. Lori Balzer, GNC director, and Elaine Balzer, her assistant, plan all the events including card parties, theater outings and local events. The club also takes day trips, mystery tours and cruises.

GNC members receive a newsletter each quarter that lists the GNC's events and excursions; as well as, other news about the bank. "We send out newsletters to about 2700 households," said Lori. "We probably have around 3500 members."

There are 11 bank locations in nine towns, with a GNC coordinator at each bank. Each community bank plans their own local events and the big trips are planned for everyone. "Sometimes we have people that will go from Bismarck to Glen Ullin for an event," said Lori. "They are welcome at any location."

The Bismarck chapter has about 65 people who attend monthly card parties, usually held at local restaurants. "We like to support the local community," said Elaine. "And maybe it's a place they haven't been before and they'll go back again."

The GNC's members enjoy the many opportunities the club provides. "They couldn't have a nicer group of girls to run the program," said Kay Verke, a GNC member. "Everything is fun. It's a good, Good Neighbor Club."

Fun is the theme that runs through everything the GNC does. "The success of our club is, these gals are experts at making the trips fun," said Dale Pahlke, Dakota Community Bank

President and CEO. "They have things for people to do to make the time pass. They don't just get on the bus for 300 to 400 miles and nothing happens."

Lori likes to develop themes for most of the trips. Usually care packages are given to members that contain hints to where the bus is traveling on mystery tours or hold game pieces to use along the way.

One of the GNC's bus trips occurred during National Hot Dog Month and the group was asked trivia questions about hot dogs. During a trip to Winnipeg, each traveler received a treasure box and played a game similar to "Deal or No Deal." On the way to the Cherry Festival in Montana, the group played a version of "Hi-Ho Cherry-O."

Most of the trips also have an educational focus. On the mystery trips, club members receive hints about their destination and learn interesting facts about where they are going.

The GNC also focuses on providing social opportunities for its members. "There are a lot of people that come by themselves," said Lori. "They have lost their spouses or have never been married."

"They meet other people and make good friends," added Elaine. "We've had a lot of people who are now rooming with each other on overnight trips. They also do things with each other outside of the Club – have coffee, lunch. It's amazing the relationships people form and how they come out of their shells."

The games the group plays at events help with forming those relationships. One in particular, the 'toilet paper' game, is good for breaking the ice.

"We pass around a roll of toilet paper and tell everyone to take as much as they want," said Elaine. "If they took four squares,





they had to tell us four things about themselves. That's how they make friendships, they learn so much about each other."

One trip was scheduled on "National Tell-a-Joke Day," and the game was based around sharing jokes. "I said to Lori, 'I don't know if they're going to do this,'" said Elaine. "We got to our destination before they were done telling jokes! We were laughing so hard on that bus."

Pahlke said developing relationships is just as important for members as the travel opportunities the club provides. "The reason we have the Good Neighbor Club is to develop relationships and provide travel with some assistance," explained Pahlke. "If you haven't traveled a lot, it's kind of a scary thing to go somewhere and not know if things are going to turn out the way you want them to."

The GNC members appreciate all the time and effort that goes into planning club events.

"I have had a chance to go on all the trips," said Carol Brown, a GNC member. "The girls are the best, they have made it so fun. It's a social event for me and I love it."

And providing a great time and fun atmosphere keeps people coming back to club events.

"When you make it fun all the time, people are excited and willing to take the risk of a mystery trip because they know they'll have a good time," said Pahlke. "These people have the confidence the girls are taking them someplace they're going to enjoy. We fill a bus and nobody knows where it's going!"

Building confidence with their customers through the GNC shows members they will be treated right during any transaction they have with Dakota Community Bank. The support for the club starts at the top and flows throughout the bank.

"If we have a bus trip that leaves at seven in the morning, Dale is there to send us off," said Lori. "There are not a lot of bank presidents that will come out and jump on a bus and say 'you guys have a good time.'"

But it is the support of the whole Dakota Community Bank team that makes the GNC such a huge success.

"Everybody within the bank supports us," added Elaine. "They are willing to help out with any function that we have."

The relationships the Good Neighbor Club members develop with each other will last for years. The staff at the bank also appreciates the bonds that are formed with its members. "We've even become friends with a lot of our customers," said Lori. It really is a good, Good Neighbor Club.

For more information contact your local Dakota Community Bank or visit their website at [www.dakotacommunitybank.com](http://www.dakotacommunitybank.com)

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