Volunteers are at the heart of big project success at Doddridge Senior Center

It may take volunteers a bit longer, but it is quality not speed that Marvin "Smokey" Travis, executive director of Doddridge County Senior Citizens was looking for in his projects. It is because of the actual hands-on support of skilled members of the community that Smokey can point with pride to buildings and other improvements that have been completed at the senior center over a span of twenty years.

After becoming director in February 1990, Smokey (as he prefers) knew that there were challenges to meet and problems to solve. Doddridge County is one-hundred percent rural with an inadequate tax base. Not to be deterred, Smokey and the community sought to identify ways to improve, strengthen and grow essential infrastructure for seniors. As with many senior centers, Doddridge County Senior volunteers supported a number of activities including the quilt club, monthly dinners, bake sales and others. Armed with professional experience in business and banking, Smokey understood the community, and he was knowledgeable about finance. He sat about the tasks of building his staff, working closely with the board of directors and assessing the organizations financial condition. What seemed a mountain to climb became a spark that invigorated the community when the bank, which held a mortgage loan for previously purchased property, forgave the accumulated interest due if the center could pay off the principle balance. By November 1990, the center celebrates a "note burning" having paid off the loan. All these events so engaged and motivated the community that they asked to be a part of the momentum.

Beginning in 1994, the center was able to purchase property across from the center for much needed added parking. In 1997, Doddridge County Senior Citizens, Inc. and Childers Manor, Inc. formed an L.L.C. which made them stronger as a team to create opportunities for employment, which in turn stimulated economic growth and was the start of events to ensure the continued success of the senior center for years to come. Under the construction direction of the center's maintenance man, March of 2000 saw an additional purchase of property next to the Childers Manor Apartment complex. This was followed in 2003 with the construction of a new six stall 30' x 90' garage to house the center's van, store records

and surplus inventory, as well as store Red Cross disaster shelter items. Next on the list was the dream of a fitness center. The new center opened in January of 2006. The 30' x 80' building cost less than half the amount of other bids on this project as did the garage project. The following year in 2007, Smokey was able to put a security camera system in the senior center and in the senior apartment complex, Childers Manor just next door. This addition was a big help to his small staff to ensure the safety and well-being of residents and visitors alike. With the continued assistance and expertise of community members a 48K natural gas Generac generator was also installed as a power backup for the center. The Doddridge Country Senior Citizens center has always been a designated emergency location for the community. Now it is involved in Emergency Preparedness as a designated emergency shelter in case of power outage, flooding or other disasters. "Your greatest successes are seldom accomplished single handedly," said Smokey. "Our community was particularly blessed with a great group of retired individuals who wanted to be involved and make a lasting impact to benefit others now and in the future. I will be forever grateful."

During those years, Smokey was able to compile a "go-to" list of 40-45 people that wanted to support the center in any way they could. Their experience ranged from demolition and site preparation to construction, carpentry and so much more. They worked on and offered expert advice on every aspect of the centers many projects. As with all things, in the time since the completion of these major projects, many on his "go-to" list have passed on. There are many factors influencing a changing senior population in the area. From working longer to raising grandchildren, there are not as many retired individuals to volunteer and socialize. Still the center and the community have accomplished a great deal. "My dedicated staffers, a very supportive board of directors, and of course our experienced volunteers, made and make all the effort worthwhile," said Smokey.

Volunteers can make all the difference. Congratulations to all involved!