



# Steele Ozone & Kidder County Press

**CLOSED**  
 Friday,  
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 Have a Happy  
 Thanksgiving!

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## 30 Years of Winterfest, kind of

Rewind that old Christmas VHS, all the way back to the year 1992. Kathy Benson, formerly of Hatton, ND, is just settling down in Steele. Being from Hatton, Kathy had the opportunity to celebrate and participate in "Winter Snow Festival" during the holiday season. This winter celebration was something that brought their community together with fun and games and the goal of spreading "Christmas Cheer". Steele didn't have anything like this at the time, which is what sent Kathy down the path of creating, what we now know today, as Winterfest.

In the beginning, the goal was to have events the whole family could enjoy without spending a dime. It was simply to spread the Christmas spirit. Of course, when you want to do something big AND for free, people may be skeptical at first about its chances of success. The first Winterfest Board was formed with four other ladies in the community that shared Kathy's vision. Along with Kathy, Diane Bakkum, Nadine

Hoffman, Connie Renner, and Wanda Agnew joined to form the fabulous five that took Winterfest from concept to reality.

In 1995, their board decided they needed a nice tree for the community to decorate and sing Christmas carols around. At the time, there was a tree next to the courthouse, but it wasn't the type you wanted to decorate. In another display of the community coming together, Dwight and Shelia Randall of Steele, donated a 12ft pine tree from their own yard so that the community could have that "Fah who foraze; Dah who doraze; Welcome Christmas, come this way!" Whoville experience. That same tree is the tree you see today that towers next to the courthouse and has been deemed the official Winterfest Tree.

During the early years, these ladies took it upon themselves to decorate with lights by getting up on the roofs of businesses. This is how Kathy claims they got a lot of stuff done in the early years of Winterfest. She recalls being

on top of these buildings and she would hear "you shouldn't be up there" from someone on the street. They would ignore the warnings and would yell back something to the effect of "Are you coming to the get-together later? Bring Cookies!" This sort of guerilla, volun-telling warfare is what really got the ball rolling with Winterfest. It didn't come without casualties, however. According to Kathy, Nadine lost her "pretty green jacket" to a bunch of roof tar, which she couldn't help but laugh at!

By '99, the Winterfest board had recruited Maralee Kalianoff, Bev Schwab and Mary Ellen Strand to help, but it was time for Winterfest to grow, so they wrote a letter to the Steele Betterment Club to ask for more help. Since then, many wonderful people have stepped into the role of a Winterfest committee member to keep this wonderful tradition going.

Have a town get-together, sing Christmas songs, someone bring bars, someone bring apple



Original Winterfest Committee (L to R) - Nadine Hoffman, Connie Renner, Diane Bakkum, Kathy Benson along with driver Carl Wagner (not pictured Wanda Agnew)

cider, kids bring an ornament to put on the tree... this was the principle on which Winterfest was founded. Even today, some of the events they started 30 years ago are still a part of the tradition. Book reading with Mrs. Claus, the vendor show, the horse drawn sleigh ride, the tree lighting ceremony, special church services, the live nativity... all of these are traditions that are still an integral part of the Winterfest celebration.

This year would mark 30 years of Winterfest if not counting the few years that COVID-19 put the kibosh on it. During those years, however, some other Kidder County gals dreamt of a Hallmark Channel Christmas and of giving back to their community.

In 2021, Erin Dewitz, and friend Emily Boddeker, decided they would solve both of those issues by bringing Winterfest back to life. Erin, the same woman (See "Winterfest" on Page 7)

## KC Coaches Club Launches Fitness Center/Weight Room Fundraiser



Weight room

In June, the Kidder County School Board voted to assist the Kidder County Coaches Club with a payment for \$120,000 to renovate the old Tech Ed Shop into a fitness center/weight room for our Kidder County students. With the recent failure of two school referendums in 2023, students and coaches decided that something needed to be done to the musty, old weight room with dated equipment to help our students and student-athletes have a chance at becoming healthy and physically fit. The agreement is for the Coaches Club to reimburse the school funding within ten years. With the approval of the plan, many volunteers and coaches got to work immediately in cleaning, building a wall, painting and renovating the space in hopes of having it ready for our students before school began in August.

The Coaches Club agreed to

partner with Johnson Commercial Fitness to secure appropriate flooring, weights and cardio equipment that was custom made with our Kidder County Wolf Head and KC Logos.

In addition, two custom large logo signs were ordered and hung along with a small bathroom renovation to complete the project.

At the beginning of the school year, coaches sought funds from our dedicated, local supporter- the Steele Vets Club. In a gracious gesture, the Vets Club voted to donate a total of \$20,000 to the project as it was in its initial stages. In addition, the Coaches Club was able to add another \$10,000 of their own funding to make a fall payment of \$30,000 back to the school at the September School Board Meeting. This leaves \$90,000 left to fundraise on the project.

In late September, the first (See "Weight Room" on Page 10)



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