

Salvation comes in many forms. For one West Bend resident, the West Bend Senior Center is the catalyst for an active, engaging lifestyle and an escape from solitude.

After spending their lives in Wisconsin, Joan and her husband hopped into their motor home and headed south in retirement. After several years and lots of adventures, Joan's husband's declining health and a desire to live closer to their daughters brought the couple back to Wisconsin. It may not have been the life they dreamed of, but it was a good one nonetheless, Joan said. That changed in December, 2014, when her husband passed away. "For the first time in my life, I was living alone and I was uncomfortable," she said. "I spent most of my time alone. I was devastated."

One day Joan's daughter called and insisted they go to lunch together. Joan eagerly accepted without asking where they were going.

"She took me to the Senior Center," Joan said. "My girls didn't want me to sit every day in a tiny apartment, alone and afraid. They wanted me to live."

The West Bend Senior Center is operated by Senior Citizens Activities, Inc, which receives funding from the United Way of Washington County. The center's diverse programs range from fitness and health to crafts, cards and much more.

Joan signed up for a few activities that interested her. First card games, then serving meals, then chorus. As her schedule filled, her outlook improved. What started as a way to occasionally get out of her apartment turned into a reason to get up each morning.

"Getting old is hard and we can't be happy all the time," Joan said, "but we need people to help us feel happy as much as we can. Between the wonderful people and the activities that fit right into my lifestyle, I can say the Senior Center has changed my life."

"I am no longer a person stuck in a room by myself," she said. "I am living and laughing. I am happy."