

Wood Center programs served 13,562 in 2018

By Katherine R. Dougan

On Friday afternoon, February 8, Chandra Broomfield, Director of Therapeutic Recreation at the A.E. Wood Activity Center in Clinton, pulled a strand of pink rope lights across the wood floor to outline a dance area. Broomfield and a crew of workers from the Department of Parks and Recreation, a full-time employee and intern at the Center, and volunteers, including Broomfield's sister, were setting up and decorating the center for its biggest yearly event, the Valentine's Sweetheart Formal.

About two hundred turned in reservations for the event, which Broomfield said is more than the center has received in years' past. She wasn't sure if that meant there would be two hundred attending, or perhaps more, however, the forty volunteers that make the evening possible were prepared to do complimentary hair and makeup for those attending. Limousine drivers were ready to deliver attendees to the red carpet at the Center from the Public Works department, where, after their hair had been styled and makeup applied, they could have a glamour photo taken to commemorate the event. At the center, they were set to enjoy a sumptuous buffet, dancing and a magical, gala evening.

This year's Sweetheart Formal, held on Saturday, February 9, was Broomfield's seventh time to put on the event, and her eleventh year as director of the center. The A.E. Wood Center, with sunlight streaming in the high windows along the back walls, off-white paint on the walls, and natural-colored wood floor, has been im-

mensely transformed from a building that formerly housed the city's library.

The space is open and inviting, providing a place for the program's participants to meet for activities. The program directed by Broomfield, who majored in therapeutic recreation at the University of Southern Mississippi, offers modified activities that allow individuals with cognitive and developmental disabilities to enjoy sports, build social skills and engage in physical activities.

Those aged fifty and up also participate in programs at the center, however, Broomfield stresses that the activities are by no means the traditional "senior" activities. In 2018, communications from the center reached 847 Clinton households; 478 via email and 369 via U.S. mail. The mailing list contained 122 names. A total of 13,562 participated in the program in 2018, which is an increase of 1,201 participants from 2017. Those utilizing the services include not only Clinton residents, but also participants in surrounding towns, such as Edwards, Bolton, Vicksburg and Canton, where there are not any programs for those fifty and older.

A monthly "Living Young Newsletter" offers descriptions of programs at the center, which includes opportunities to meet and dine in local restaurants; line dancing classes; music workshops for jam sessions; crafts; movies; painting workshops; therapeutic yoga; and a "Mystery Tour," which offers "a day of fun and education as we discover some hidden treasures in the South."



Special to The Clinton Courier

Seth Sledge is pictured helping with preparations for the Wood Activity Center's 7th Annual Sweetheart Formal, which had a record number of reservations.

**Wood Activity
& Therapeutic Center**
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The A.E. Wood Activity and Therapeutic Center houses the City of Clinton's Therapeutic Recreation (TR) Department. The facility is over 10,000 square feet and was originally built in 1969. The building was remodeled in 2013. The Therapeutic Recreation Department provides activities and programs for therapeutic purposes to individuals in the Living Young program who are age 50 and over and the Abilities program for individuals ages 6 and up with developmental, cognitive, or physical disabilities.

The facility has a three-station computer lab/program room, exercise station that includes exercise bikes, treadmills and elliptical machines. The facility also has a kitchen, small conference room, office space, lounge area and restrooms.

Some of the activities, such as painting and line dancing, put participants outside of their comfort zone, Broomfield said, adding that she, too, discovered skills and talents she didn't realize she possessed. She explained that she always learns, via the Internet or wherever she can, how to do the activities before introducing it at a workshop. That's how she learned she can paint. Now, she helps those learning to paint, and encourages those who have been taking the painting workshop for several years.

It is apparent that Broomfield loves her job, as she glances about the Cen-

ter while dance preparations continue during the afternoon interview. Prior to 2015, she was the only employee at the Center. A full-time employee was added in 2015, and she now has an intern position, which is filled by area university students studying recreational therapy. The situation at the Center is unique in the recreational therapy field, as many who work as recreational therapists often are in hospitals or care centers. "They [interns] get to be involved in activities here," Broomfield said, adding that she enjoys being involved in activities at the center, too. "I love my job!"

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