

Mr. Tony DeLucia
President
Willow Area Seniors Inc.
HC 89 Box 57
Willow, Alaska 99688

September 18, 2006

Dear Tony,

I had planned on writing you to assure that we agree on cleanliness standards with regard to the weekly Community lunch that your organization sponsors in the Community Center. Luckily I waited so that I can additionally offer you new information that we received Friday September 1 and to provide you a copy of the current regs to which we are all held accountable.

First let me reiterate what I and so many in the community believe, that the weekly lunch that your organization sponsors is wonderful, and the food when I have been there is very good, nourishing, balanced and well worth the minimal cost to each who attends. It is too bad that so many cannot make it, those who work on Wednesdays and/or those who have family obligations that keep them from participating. It is a wonderful avenue to hear the stories and to learn and gain from our elder population and as one avenue for them to get to meet all the next generations.

On August 12 I was one of the volunteers that facilitated the wedding in the Community Center. I was surprised and appalled to find that the warming table was filthy with sticky residue on both sides of the wood counters and drippings down all 4 sides of the table that had thickened into a solid mess around such things as the screw heads. I spent 1 1/2 hours working exclusively on that table to get it ready for the pot luck that the wedding couple had planned. I apologized to the bride for this needing to be done while she and her party were setting up, but she stated that she appreciated the effort. She had noted the dirt when she came up to see the facilities and had planned on scrubbing it herself before the rest of the guests arrived. I also found remnants of dry spaghetti noodles and dried on tomatoes under the dish drainer on the back counter by the 3 sink set up. I will say that I had not previously noted this kind of dirt in attending the few lunches that I have been able to attend. The rest of the kitchen seemed in good order and ready for use. No other kitchen functions had occurred other than Community Lunch for quite some time.

Friday September 1 the kitchen was inspected by the State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. I am pleased to say that we have only a very few items to correct to come into full compliance with the regulations, current and those being implemented on October 15. In the course of assuring our expected uses and the impact of the new regulations coming out, we found out that anytime regular preparation and serving is done for elders and open to the public, the kitchen and all aspects of the cooking, serving, etc are considered high risk. This is because elders have diminishing immunologic responses, thus become more susceptible to such things as food borne illnesses. Because the public is served, especially on a regular basis including elders, our facility will remain high on the DEC's list for visits and assurances that we are in compliance with regulations. It sounds like we have only a few items to change to come into compliance with existing and new regs. The new regs are expected to be finalized in about a month, with the written version available about 2 months later. I have made you a copy of the existing regs to share with Dee and Rich who I presume will remain your paid cooks, and any others that you would like to share it with. I will be reading it from cover to cover, and we will be implementing the different

aspects that they address. We assume that you will assure that your staff and volunteers join in that effort and comply with the regs that are applicable.

Here are a few of the changes we already know from the inspector's visit that will have to happen. Each of our organizations will have to now assure that the regular volunteer or paid kitchen help carry a valid food handler's permit. WACO also needs to have a manager-type identified. Our new caretaker will be trained and permitted to provide that function. Per a follow up call with the inspector, the Willow Seniors will not need to have a manager permit as long as your workers are willing to comply with the WACO manager's direction and feedback. The DEC staff will provide free training, give the post test and issue the food worker permits. I believe that the manager role needs additional training beyond that level, which your organization is welcome to attain as we will. We will be inviting all the community organizations to send their members that they want to be the regular food service workers for that training. The fee is \$10 for each worker permit (good for 3 years), and the manager permit is about \$100 (also good for 3 years). The DEC reviewer assured us that not all volunteers need these permits, only those who will provide the consistent oversight to the food functions that each group puts on. And another distinction is that only when the public is being served is the permitting process required (as opposed to just those who belong in a defined group using the kitchen). Two related physical changes that will need your organization to join us in compliance, are about which sinks are to be used for what. The small sink in the 'prep table' is to be used as the hand washing sink, and WACO will be modifying the table to assure that it is in compliance with the regs. The inspector states that we can use the large colanders to rinse the vegetables and fruit in only the middle sink, the rinse sink, of the 3 sink set up along the back wall, with care taken to not let standing water accumulate beneath the colander. It is my understanding that Rich was advised of this and his initial response has been to refuse to comply. Another impact on the Willow Seniors is that of the kitchen permit. Because your group stores its own food there including that in your own refrigerators and freezers, you will need to organize and achieve a separate permit for the kitchen. We can provide you contact information to arrange that inspection. Your kitchen permit will need to be posted along with WACO's for easy viewing. And a last change is that from now on, all food handling must be with utensils or gloved hands. Because gloves are in the kitchen, it may be that your staffs already are in compliance with this reg but I ask you to make sure that they know this rule.

So in summary, please note that while most of the kitchen is being left in good shape, your cooks need to increase their vigilance about cleaning that warming table. New regulations are about to go into effect that affect WACO and the Seniors more than any other of the groups currently using the kitchen facilities. We will be counting on you to assure that your staff and volunteers comply with the regs both those in place now and those that are coming into existence. We will keep you posted on the scheduling of the DEC worker to come do training. And we will bring the structure of the kitchen into full compliance as fast is humanly possible. Feel free to contact me with questions.

Sincerely,
Linda Oxley, Chair
cc:
Lori Wiertsema
file