

## Fundraiser benefits culinary program at passages

by CATHY ULRICH

When the Billings Soroptimists host the Night of Wine and Roses on Jan. 26, the group will be helping out the new culinary program at Passages, the pre-release center for Department of Corrections offenders, on South 27th Street.

"This is something that we've committed to for a year," said Gerri Voto-Braun, the Wine and Roses chair. "We're impacting a good number of women." The program is expected to start in January, and donations from the Soroptimists will provide the startup funding. "What we'd like to do is have from eight to 12 female offenders come in and work with our chef on site," Passages Director Jan Begger said. "It would be a combination of classroom training and hands-on training."



DAVID GRUBBS/Gazette Staff

Allan Maust, head chef at the Passages pre-release center, and inmate Amanda Hollenbeck cook fish patties in the center's kitchen. A new program to teach Passages inmates culinary skills will receive money raised at the Soroptimists Night of Wine and Roses fundraiser.

if you go

The Soroptimists Club's annual fundraiser, "Night of Wine and Roses," will be held Saturday, Jan. 26, at the Billings Depot.

Sponsored by Intermountain Distributing, the event includes a wine tasting, silent auction, hors d'oeuvres and music.

Tickets are \$50, \$65 for reserved seating and \$650 for a table to 10 for reserved seating.

For tickets, go to [wineandroses.info](http://wineandroses.info)

or call 294-1948.

The Night of Wine and Roses, sponsored by Intermountain Distributing, is the Soroptimists' annual fundraising event, held at the Billings Depot. "This is our primary fundraiser for the whole year," Voto-Braun said. "All the money we give out comes from this fundraiser."

The event features a silent auction, a wine tasting, hors d'oeuvres by Tom Nelson Catering and music. The Night of Wine and Roses also plays host to the Soroptimists Young Artists Competition, which features award-winning artwork by local high school students. The artwork is judged by the staff of the Yellowstone Art Museum, and the prize-winning pieces will be up for auction.

"Hopefully the young artists will also be in attendance," Voto-Braun said.

Previous Night of Wine and Roses fundraisers have helped sponsor the club's identifying project, Baby Think it Over. The Baby Think it Over project provides computerized babies to local high schools for health classes, so students can learn about the responsibilities of being parents. "This project is at the end," Voto-Braun said, citing the lack of a new high school as a reason the Soroptimists are discontinuing the project. "All we can do is just maintain the current babies."

When it came time to choose a project to sponsor this year, the Soroptimists chose the Passages culinary program. "That's just one way we thought we could have an impact in a really quick way," Voto-Braun said.

Allan Maust, the chef at Passages, will lead the culinary program. He currently has inmates at Passages working with him to prepare meals for their fellow inmates as well as the men at the Alpha House. "Within the first couple of weeks, they're pretty well trained," he said.

Maust has a staff of four full-time employees helping him in the kitchen, plus eight inmates whose parole eligibility dates have not yet come up. When the culinary program starts, he'll be training pre-release clients. Begger said there haven't been any issues with staff and inmates working together. "Pretty much when people come and apply with us, they know what kind of work we do," she said. "They understand they're working with women offenders. We haven't had any problems. It's been a great program."

Passages, located in the former Howard Johnson hotel on South 27th Street, is home to three programs: Pre-release, alcohol and drug treatment and the assessment and sanction unit. The pre-release center is housed on the first floor, and is home to female inmates who have six months or less of their sentence. The assessment and sanction unit on the second floor determines the level of care and custody for offenders; many in the program will head on to the pre-release center or probation. The alcohol and drug treatment program is located on the third floor. The inmates in that program are in classes from 5:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.

"It's treatment, treatment, treatment up here," Begger said. "Very structured, very good treatment here." The goal of Passages, Begger said, is to prepare the clients for their return to the outside world. "Reintegration is what we're focusing on," she said. Passages officials hope the culinary program will help with that goal by giving participants a background in a high-demand career.

"The Soroptimists were really excited to do this, especially in a market like Billings, where there's a real demand for people with hotel experience, restaurant experience," Begger said.

Voto-Braun agrees. "When they get out of the pre-release center, they can apply and get jobs in the restaurant or hotel industry," she said. "They'll be more able to substantiate or support their families."