

History, hauntings and heritage gives local youth a sense of belonging

AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho Extension educators' knowledge of Salmon's history created historical tours for youth to have a sense of belonging, in strengthening communities and improving lives.

The Situation

Salmon's Drug Free Youth (DFY) had traditionally hosted a haunted house to raise funds for leadership development opportunities, but in October of 2024, hosting a haunted house was impossible. The group needed a similar style event that would help raise funds but keep with the spooky spirit of the event.

Our Response

Extension Educator Katie McFarland combined her love of history, the supernatural and the Drug Free Youth program to create haunted history tours that would benefit the DFY. The goal of the event was to replace a fundraiser for the DFY and use the event to build the community. As a native to Salmon, McFarland drew upon her knowledge of the area, local historians, historic publications and local folklore to create the tour content. In 2024, the tour stopped at eight historic buildings along main street. McFarland discussed construction, architecture, significant events, historic figures, building uses and a few ghost stories at each stop. The 2025 tour included seven new tour stops and one repeated stop. A summer off shoot of the tours included six stops visible from the Salmon River Island and focused on river history. The event was held in the evening on three weekend nights in the month



Extension Educator Katie McFarland gives a historical talk about the Shenon Building. Photo by Curt Esterholt.

of October and charged attendance that benefitted the Salmon DFY.

Program Outcomes

One hundred and sixty people attended in 2024 and again in 2025 over the course of three nights. Of those attending in 2025, 18 members answered survey questions about the tour. Of those that responded, 53% of them had lived in Salmon most of their lives, 12% had lived in Salmon their whole life and 35% had lived there less than 10 years. Participants reported that the event was more than just fun. 65% stated they learned a lot more about Salmon, and 53% said they felt very connected to their community after the tour. Local history was an important part of the event, with 88% of surveyed participants stating it was very important to

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learn about their local history, and 82% strongly agreed the tour was preserving that history. 59% of surveyed participants stated that after the tour they had a lot of pride in their community. 53% of respondents strongly agreed the tour strengthened their sense of belonging. 88% of participants met new people or reconnected with people they hadn't seen in a long time. According to the Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development, such events create a connection to local identities, develop community pride, educate citizens on the community, preserve local heritage, create a sense of place, build social connections and increase social capital.

According to the University of Minnesota Extension, social capital is the glue that holds communities together. It improves lives and makes healthier, safer

and richer communities. Through a fun, educational and sometimes spooky evening, community members were able to come together for fun and education while strengthening their community and supporting the Salmon Drug Free Youth program.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- Salmon Drug Free Youth

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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