

Festivities aid purchase of child ID kits



LARRY MAYER/Gazette Staff

Billings crime prevention and public relations officer David Punt talks with children in the day care at St. John's Lutheran Ministries. Punt and crime prevention coordinator Peggy Forsberg handed out child identification kits for the children.

By BECKY SHAY, Gazette Staff

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Food and entertainment were the basis for a good cause for kids Friday evening at Mission Ridge.

A dinner theater, with the meal served in part by police brass and officers, raised money for child identification kits for the Billings Police Department's Crime Prevention Center to give out.

Mission Ridge, an independent retirement community on the St. John's Lutheran Ministries campus, hosted the event. The evening started with children from the St. John's day care, Center for Generations, receiving ID kits. The festivities then progressed to a night out for adults, with appetizers, a social hour and a meal.

Two Miss Montanas were part of the entertainment. Miss Montana 1947, Doris Chaffin Anderson, talked about her reign. Current Miss Montana Christie Hageman, a classically trained soprano, sang.

Margie Prokop, resident services coordinator at Mission Ridge, said the idea to purchase kits came from Police Chief Rich St. John.

"It's something not in their budget and that really makes a difference for the community," Prokop said.

Organizers hope to raise enough money to purchase 6,500 kits, which officers and volunteers give out at special events and during day care and school visits. The kits are also available at Cop Shops in Billings.

Officer Dave Punt said the kits show adults two ways to gather DNA - how to remove hair with a root attached and to swab a cheek. They also have the materials to take fingerprints.

"After about 2 years old, fingerprints get bigger, but they stay the same," Punt said.

The kits also have places to insert a current photo and track personal information. That information, including details such as height, weight, hair and eye color, can be listed in pencil and be updated during the years, Punt said.

The kits are invaluable if a child goes missing, Punt said, because adults have all of the information used in an Amber Alert in one spot.

Mission Ridge sponsored a similar fundraiser last year for the Billings Fire Department. The money was used to purchase new barbecue grills for each fire station.

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