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An eye toward saving your family history

Pat McKnight Special correspondent Mar 1, 2019

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Onalaska Area Historical Society member Pam Wolfert, left, discusses the conversion of videotapes to digital format with Linda O'Connell, owner of Take 5 Productions. O'Connell presented a program about taking and saving photos and videos at the historical society's February meeting.

Pat McKnight

Converting old videos and photographs to digital can preserve the recordings for posterity.

"It's for the next generation; that's why you do all this," said Linda O'Connell, owner of Take 5 Productions, in her presentation to the Onalaska Area Historical Society meeting.

Starting her business 13 years ago, O'Connell has been helping people convert their videos and photographs to digital to preserve the past and allow viewing on modern electronic devices.

O'Connell's business converts videos and photographs taken on outdated formats such as reel-to-reel, 8 mm, Super 8, 16 mm, VHS Beta, camcorder, still slides, negatives and photographs to digital.

She can also restore photographs and create photo montages incorporating music into the slideshows. She can also convert audio recordings to formats that can be played using today's devices.

To better ensure the video and photographic records are viewable by future generations, O'Connell offered recommendations for taking the pictures and tapes.

"The equipment has changed, but the basics (of taking good photos and videos) haven't," O'Connell said, "and the three most important words are practice, practice, practice."

Factors to take into consideration for capturing worthwhile video and photos include having the adequate lighting. Lighting conditions can be improved by opening window shades, turning on more lights or using the camera's light or flash.

Videographers should also be aware of background sounds and that the audio doesn't follow the subject when zooming in for closer shots.

"Zoom in before turning on the camera," O'Connell said. "The zoom will amplify the movements. Use a tripod to steady the camera and don't walk while recording."

She advises to include people in scenery shots and to get down to their level when recording kids and pets.

For special events, O'Connell told those attending the OAHS meeting to ask themselves whether the event is worth shooting and if it might be better to buy a recording from a professional. She cautions video and photo takers against becoming too involved in recording the event and not experiencing what's happening.

"Don't get so caught up in filming that you don't enjoy the moment," O'Connell said.

When taping a performance, videographers might want to ask performers what part of the production is the best to capture for lasting memories.

Creating memories shouldn't be reserved to special events; O'Connell advised capturing everyday events and objects.

"Make a tape of 'A Day in the Life,'" O'Connell said. "Record your car, rooms in your house, your job."

Another consideration is how the video or photo will be used. If the video will be submitted to such Internet sites as YouTube and Facebook, the filming should be done using a horizontal format.

Trying to capture a still shot from a video generally produces a blurred image because there are 33 pictures in one second of video.

O'Connell recommended deleting redundant and poor images and storing desirable photos and videos on an external hard drive to better ensure safekeeping.

O'Connell's presentation is one of the OAHS free programs held at the Onalaska Public Library. The society offers historical programs the third Tuesday of every month except during the summer and in December.

