

Naples Daily News

Your Turn featuring guest columnist Dr. Jaclynn Faffer

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Seniors empowered toward exploration, self-discovery

Throughout the month of September, advocates for seniors and the unique issues facing older adults will come together to celebrate the crucial role of senior centers during National Senior Center Month.

The first senior center in the United States, the William Hodson Community Center in Bronx, New York, opened its doors in 1943. Its purpose was to reach out to people who had retired but needed a place to gather to stay connected to others. Exactly 80 years later, senior centers remain critically important with more than 10,000 organizations nationwide supporting millions of older adults from all walks of life.

Today's senior centers are places of discovery, encouraging older adults to discover their unique interests, talents and aspirations. Senior centers offer a vibrant, action-packed combination of wellness activities, art and music programs, and educational programs – all with the opportunity to socialize and develop new friendships.

Baker Senior Center Naples is unique because it is a hybrid organization. We offer the recreational, educational and wellness activities of a traditional senior center as well as professionally delivered programs in dementia respite, caregiver support, geriatric case management and mental health counseling. These services are open to everyone 60 years of age and older regardless of race or religion.

During National Senior Center Month, Baker Senior Center Naples will celebrate exploration, self-discovery, and individuality of and for older adults. It should be

noted that we will be participating in this annual tradition for the first time in our new permanent home on Autumn Oaks Lane in North Naples.

From gardening to drum circles to theme-based dementia respite support groups to helping seniors become tech savvy, Baker Senior Center Naples is a community hub where older adults find friendship, meaning and purpose. The power of these connections is evident in the demand for services. Since opening the doors to our 30,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art building, 1,200 new members have joined.

Revolutionary singer-songwriter David Bowie once said, 'Aging is an extraordinary process where you become the person you always should have been.' I could not agree more. Our members discover their best selves every day. They demand the opportunity to continue connecting, exploring and expressing their individuality. We serve them and this community the best we can with fun and engaging programs, while also providing practical tools and resources to help them stay healthy and independent.

National Senior Center Month emphasizes the tremendous potential that senior centers across the country deliver in their communities, including programming that empowers older adults to holistically age well and strengthen mind, body, spirit and community connections. The professional staff, volunteers and board of Baker Senior Center Naples join others in recognizing our role in empowering older adults toward exploration and self-discovery during this month-long celebration and beyond.

Founded in 2014, Baker Senior Center Naples is a non-profit organization accredited by the National Council on Aging and National Institute of Senior Centers. We were the first senior center in Collier County and exist thanks to generous community support. Our hours are Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. For additional information, visit NaplesSeniorCenter.org or call 239-325-4444.

Dr. Jaclynn Faffer is president/CEO of Baker Senior Center Naples, a nonprofit organization that provides comprehensive, 'one-stop-shop' professional services and programs for local seniors and their families.

