

Naples Daily News

Senior Center gives older adults power of connection

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Your Turn

Dr. Jaclynn Faffer

Guest columnist

Each year during the month of May, we come together as a community to celebrate Older Americans Month to recognize the contributions of older adults and to highlight trends in aging.

At Baker Senior Center Naples, we reaffirm our commitment to serving older adults each and every day. With our new building at 6200 Autumn Oaks Lane, Baker Senior Center is a nonprofit organization offering comprehensive “one-stop-shop” services and programs addressing the emotional and social needs of all adults over age 60 in Collier and southern Lee counties.

Founded as Naples Senior Center, Baker Senior Center Naples opened on January 22, 2014 to mitigate issues like isolation and loneliness. Located in a small, rented space, the center initially offered social programs and activities to just 80 seniors. Programs and services have since greatly expanded and membership has increased to more than 2,600.

Like other senior centers across the country, we offer a wide variety of social, educational and wellness programs, including classes in art, music and film; brain fitness and educational seminars; courses in technology and computer science, physical wellbeing and interest groups. These activities are offered each week thanks to a dedicated corps of nearly 300 volunteers.

What makes us unique is that we also provide essential programs and services by licensed and credentialed professionals. These include the Brookdale Cognitive Health Services, including Dementia Respite Groups and Caregiver Support; Geriatric Case Management and Senior Outreach Programs; and Mental Health Counseling. We also offer a “choice” Food Pantry.

Importantly, we are Medicare providers and are on the panels of other private insurance as well. For those who do not have Medicare, services are provided on a sliding fee scale. Referrals come to us from physicians, clergy, other senior center members and the general community.

As the leading advocate for older adults in our community, Baker Senior Center Naples has seen the local senior population increase dramatically. We have responded to this growth by offering more programs and services. We do this as one of the few local organizations serving a segment of our population that all too often goes overlooked.

Baker Senior Center Naples is delighted to join the Administration for Community Living in celebrating the 51st Older Americans Month. This year's theme, "Powered by Connection," focuses on the profound impact that meaningful connections have on the well-being and health of older adults — a relationship underscored by the U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community.

It is not just about having someone to chat with. It is about the transformative potential of community engagement in enhancing mental, physical and emotional well-being. One might say that our unique model empowers older adults through connecting them to each other, and to the services they need, to mitigate loneliness and promote healthy aging through one, easily accessible, point of contact.

With our new 30,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art building, Baker Senior Center Naples is proud to empower older adults to connect through our wide range of comprehensive programs and services. As our tag line "Looking Forward" indicates, at Baker Senior Center Naples we are always gratified to be part of positive response to issues of concern in the community.

Baker Senior Center Naples is one of just 111 senior centers across the country, including just eight within Florida, to achieve accreditation from the National Council on Aging and National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC). Accreditation means that the center meets the NISC standards in developing quality programs and services to meet the needs of seniors in the community.

For additional information about Baker Senior Center Naples as well as our programs for local seniors, please call [\(239\) 325-4444](tel:2393254444) or visit bakerseniorcenternaples.org.

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.