

## **Successful Aging:**

### **Taking A Ride With Weston**

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Once upon a time a group of third graders were asked what they thought about senior citizens. The response was shocking! “Smelly old mean people who sit around all day and complain,” was the most common response. Not Weston Senior Citizens!

The Howard J. Weston Community and Senior Center was established in 1978. Its mission was and continues to be to enhance the quality of life for the senior population by providing much needed services and programs. Back in 1978, those programs and services were primarily providing a hearty noon-time meal and a place to socialize. My how times have changed.

While we continue to provide those basic services, our center now offers a huge variety of activities and services designed to meet the needs and wants of our members. And these activities and services change as needed. During the pandemic, our center was forced to close. We offered drive-by meals and introduced virtual classes to reduce members’ isolation. We even got permission from the Governor to conduct “Parking Lot Line Dancing!” To date, our activities and services now include, but are not limited to the following:

#### **Nutrition**

- Noon-time meal
- Homebound Meals
- Dine Out Club

For many of our members, our noon-time meal is their main meal of the day. Our Dine Out Club provides our members, especially those who live alone, with an opportunity to dine out with others.

#### **Physical Fitness**

- Fitness Center/Exercise Classes
- Corn Hole/Bocce
- Line Dancing

Our physical fitness activities are designed to meet the needs of our members in their 60’s as well as those in their 90’s. Bocce and corn hole offer less exertion while our fitness center and fitness classes are designed to be flexible enough to challenge our active agers as well as our more sedentary members. Many of our members attend these classes to build their strength after surgery. Every bit of movement helps!

#### **Crafts**

- Ceramics

- Arts & Crafts
- Quilting
- Knitting/Crocheting

While our craft classes produce beautiful items, the health benefits are just as attractive. “Use it or lose it” was a statement I remember my grandmother saying as she suffered from arthritis. These activities not only keep those fingers moving, they also keep the brain thinking. Counting stitches or measuring quilting fabrics helps keep the mind active. Problem solving also comes into effect when mistakes are made.

### **Health & Wellness**

- Chair Massages
- Health Screenings/Shot Clinics
- AARP Driver’s Safety Classes
- Bible Study

Our health and wellness services and groups help to promote both mental and physical health. Our health screenings and shot clinics promote the physical health of our members. Bible study, poetry or just relaxing with a good book or a chair massage promote mental health.

### **Social**

- Red Hat Ladies/Women’s Club
- Intergenerational Pen Pals
- Veteran’s Social Club

Our social clubs are vital to our center. These clubs afford our members the opportunity to get together and discuss common areas of interest, learn a new skill, plan a volunteer activity or just get together for lunch.

### **Services**

- Legal Aid/Stand by Me 50+
- AARP Tax Assistance
- Senior Roll Call/Vial of Life

Our many services provide low cost or free resources for our members. These services may help a member who needs legal advice, help connect a member with low-cost insurance or provide free tax preparation. Senior Roll Call and the Vial of Life provide safety measures for our seniors, especially those living alone.

### **Cards & Games**

- Bingo
- Shuffleboard/Billiards
- Wii Bowling

- Card Games/Pokeno

The cards and games offered at our center provide variety to our members. The varying skill levels required for the different games allows us to meet the challenge of the diverse mental and physical levels of our members. It is always touching to see a member helping another member when skill levels begin to diminish.

Perhaps one of our more popular activities is Wii Bowling. Weston is a member of the “Wii Generation” Bowling League of Northern Delaware. This league is open to all senior organizations and living facilities in Northern Delaware. Center teams bowl weekly, competing against other teams in the league. Friendly competition ends in a roll-off among the top four teams. At the culmination of the season, teams gather for a celebratory banquet where individuals and teams are recognized and trophies are awarded.

In addition to these regularly scheduled activities, our center also offers overnight and day trips, seasonal activities and parties, social dinner dances, health and safety classes (like Stop the Bleed, Stroke Awareness, Diabetes Awareness and Matter of Balance), and basic shenanigans whenever warranted. The crazier the activity, the more they seem to like it. Our members have a strong competitive side! We have been known to challenge other centers to a morning of Jeopardy or Family Feud.

Our center added an adult day care center in 2005 to meet the needs of those requiring more assistance due to dementia or other mental or physical challenges.

Our center is an extended family, and personally, the center is my family! Former Representative John Matushefske and my mother, Sandra S. Krett, founded the center in 1978. My mom worked as Weston’s Executive Director for 47 years. When asked to take her place, I hesitated; nepotism came to mind. But, after consideration, I thought, “why not?” I felt compelled to continue the legacy that my mother had started.

The center was and is an integral part of my family: my father ran errands for the center for years; my brothers and I volunteered at the center and we grew up at Weston. My boys and now my granddaughters are growing up at Weston. The love is contagious and the losses are painful. Members care for and look out for one another. They are quick to expand their circle of friends and always willing to teach a new skill. It warms my heart when a member says to me, “Weston saved my life when my husband passed,” or “I don’t know what I would do if I didn’t have a safe place to spend the day with my friends.” This shows our center is an integral and valuable part of their life and that we are meeting our mission.

The energy of our members is truly amazing. The statement “age is just a number” is certainly true. Weston members range in age from 50 – 99 and our 90-year-olds are just as active as some of our 50-year-olds. Our members never pass up an opportunity to have a good time or try something new.

Hunter S. Thompson, often paraphrased: “Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming ‘Wow! What a ride!’” And that’s exactly what we want our members to do!

Some might ask, “Are senior centers still relevant?” We say, “Absolutely!”

While other community-based centers and fitness clubs are present on almost every corner, senior centers address the specific needs of our aging population. Our programs and services are age-specific: our fitness center equipment is designed for the “over 50” crowd. But, of most importance, senior centers provide a safe and comfortable environment for senior participants. Members are aging together; they bond with others who are experiencing the same life changes. They like having a place they can turn to for help when questions like “Is this letter a scam?”, “Can you interpret this form for me?”, or “Can you check and make sure my supplemental insurance is the best for me?” arise. Members feel safe. They know that there are people looking out for them, that there are people who care, and that they are not alone on this part of life’s journey. They know that we are family!

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