Front & Center
Sharing the Power of Healthy Aging

A publication of the Senior Center. Vol. 4, Issue 1

Who needs the Center? It might not be who you think.
People who could benefit most from social connections may have the hardest time taking the first step.

What does our typical member look like? Meet Jean.
Jean is a 75-year-old retired nurse who lives in Albemarle County. She heard about the Center from a friend who talked her into trying a day trip three years ago. Since then, Jean has been coming every week for Chair Yoga and the Apple/Mac User’s Group, and she enjoys Bunko, the Monthly Luncheon, and complaining about the parking. She reads the weekly enews, looks forward to the bi-monthly newsletters, and often picks up a copy of the current calendar in the lobby. Jean is considering volunteering with the Center, maybe at the Welcome Desk, because she enjoys the social interaction she finds here. Jean tells her friends that the Center is a lifesaver.

It’s easy to find Jean, who is a composite of our most represented membership traits, any day of the week, in almost any program.

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Enid Krieger and Paul Jacob co-chair a task force made up of community members, partners, volunteers, donors, members, and staff.

A Model for Others
Setting our sights on a fourth national accreditation

In 2002 the Center became the first nationally accredited senior center in Virginia. Not an easy task—the National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) says that only about 120 of the approximately 11,400 senior centers in America are accredited. And since the designation is valid for just five years, laurel-resting is not an option.

The Center was accredited again in 2007 and in 2013, at which time NISC program manager Maureen O’Leary noted that we were one of only seven organizations to have completed the process for a third time. “These are centers that are held up as models for others to follow,” she wrote in her notification letter.

Dozens of individuals on the Accreditation Task Force and related work groups are participating in the effort to achieve our fourth national accreditation. This rigorous process entails self-evaluation on nine standards, a lengthy application, and an on-site review by NISC. Insights from accreditation volunteers always lead to improvements, and we’re excited about what will emerge from this year’s process. We’re confident that another accreditation will be one of them, ensuring our community continues to have one of the best centers in the country!

9 standards of excellence for accreditation:
Purpose • Community • Governance • Program Planning • Administration & Human Resources • Evaluation • Fiscal Management • Records & Reports • Facility

Accreditation Sponsor
The Colonnades, a Sunrise Senior Living Community sponsored by Foundations of the University of Virginia, has been our loyal sponsor since 2002. Thank you!

Thanks to YOU, more than 21,500 seniors in our region have access to programs proven to support physical and mental health and to reduce illness, dependency, and social isolation.
When Dorothy Monty moved from New York to Charlotte, she suspected the transition wouldn’t be easy, especially since, outside of her family, she didn’t really know anyone in her new town. The wrong thing to do, she realized, would be to “stay home and grieve.” Instead, she came to the Center, looking to get involved, and get involved she did. Along with trying out programs and signing on for trips, Dorothy volunteered to help at the Welcome Desk and with administrative work. As it turned out, the gift of her time brought another gift as well. Dorothy discovered that her former employer has a program that matches retirees’ volunteer service with a grant. If she completed at least 40 hours of service, she could apply for a grant honoring that service and benefiting the nonprofit. “I immediately wanted to get it,” she remembers. “If you believe in something, I think you should promote it the best you can.”

And Dorothy does believe in the Center as an important resource for people as they age. Given that both her mother and her grandmother lived long lives, Dorothy suspects that she will be benefiting from this resource for many years to come. “Living into my 90s is in my DNA,” she jokes. “I used to say I didn’t want to live that long. People are living longer, but not all are seeing the quality of life they used to have.”

Since joining the Center, however, Dorothy has been amazed by the health and vitality of the people she meets here, and she credits their engagement with Center programs and activities. “I have to believe it is the Senior Center that enables them to do so well.”
For the Record(er)
A retired teacher shares her love of music with first time musicians

Gary Porter has always loved music, so she knew she wanted to do something with music when she joined the Center in 2015. However, even after checking out the Center’s many performing groups, she still felt like there wasn’t anything here that she could do.

A recorder player since childhood, Gary volunteered to start and lead a recorder group. She notes that since children play recorders in school, most people think they are easier and more accessible than other instruments. “But,” she warns, “the recorder is an easy instrument to play badly,” so everyone can benefit from lessons.

Most of her students have never had any musical training, but “They are just so vibrant and excited about what they are doing. They love a challenge. It’s just a joy to work with them!”

March is international Play the Recorder Month. To celebrate in 2017, Gary’s class gave its first recital in the Center’s lobby. “They entered with fear and trembling, but did a wonderful job and felt so accomplished afterward!” An article about the recital was published in the American Recorder Journal. In 2018, the group became an official consort of the American Recorder Society! They are currently preparing for another recital in September.

New players are welcome. Gary will work with anyone who wants to get involved. “I’m a big believer that everyone at any age can learn. If you are willing to try, you can do it!”

Best of all, Gary shares that leading the recorder group has lifted her spirits enormously. “This is the music I love the most. I appreciate being allowed to do something that is so important to me.”

What’s in a name?

As a verbal trigger that conjures up certain ideas and images in people’s minds, a name carries a lot of weight. And in today’s cultural landscape, our name can be anything from misleading to off-putting.

In 2008 researchers at SIR suggested putting more weight on “Center” and less on “Senior.” In a 2011 survey, over a third of respondents said the name Senior Center would discourage them from participating. More research last fall identified perceived barriers to greater understanding and use of our programs and services. One of the major objections to participation? “I’m not old enough.”

The Senior Center is widely known but not widely understood. Addressing this perception-reality gap is essential for attracting new audiences as we prepare to break ground on The Center at Belvedere. People make decisions about participating based on how they see themselves, and many simply don’t identify with “senior.” The name Senior Center, as our 2011 survey made clear, is getting in our way.

So we are becoming The Center—part of a rebrand that will address the “I’m not old enough” issue and also provide a logical transition to The Center at Belvedere. The goal is to encourage more people to find a way into the organization, resulting in better community health. And that, after all, is the name of the game.

Monthly Giving: Impact Made Easy. Contact Emily Evans at emily@seniorcenterinc.org to join the Sustainers Circle today!
Note-ables!

Love the sound of big bands, jazz quartets, or classical pianists? How about children’s choirs, opera recitals, or a cappella groups? The Center at Belvedere auditorium will be able to host them all!

The performing arts auditorium will be a versatile space at the heart of the new center. Plans include a 400-seat flat-floor auditorium for performances, lectures, and special events. The design team is working with acousticians to maximize the space for performers and audiences. Each material is considered on the basis of how much sound it reflects or absorbs. The stage will have a wheelchair lift, and the backstage includes a green room that can also be used for small rehearsals.

Fun fact: People absorb sound, so the space will sound different depending on how many people are on stage and in the audience!

The architectural team is learning much from the arts community. Members of the Wednesday Music Club joined a recent design meeting to offer advice on space, stage, and acoustics. We’re excited to be partnering with the group to provide recital space for the student musicians it supports at the Boys and Girls Club and its wonderful music teachers. The Club plans to move its monthly meetings to The Center at Belvedere.

Progress continues! Thanks to your generous support, the campaign has surpassed $12.3 million in gifts and pledges! We still need your help to break ground and finish this project. Call campaign director Kittie Abell to help today.

Your support ensures the Center can serve both the Jeans and the Stans of our community. Thank you!