

Painesville Seniors adjusting to Lake County Central YMCA collaboration



Painesville Seniors Executive Director Denise Powell and other members participate in an aquatic exercise group at the Lake County Central YMCA on Jan. 11. Tawana Roberts — The News-Herald



A group of Painesville seniors enjoy various social activities at the Lake County Central YMCA on Jan. 11. Tawana Roberts — The News-Herald

It has not been an easy journey, but Painesville seniors appear to be slowly adapting to change.

Last May, the former [Painesville Area Senior Citizens Center relocated](#) from 85 North Park Place to the Lake County Central YMCA at 933 Mentor Ave. Because of a devastating fire in 2010, the building that housed the senior center was [sold to the Lake County commissioners](#).

Will Cook is enjoying the variety of options that [Painesville Seniors](#) — the new formal name of the organization — and [Central YMCA](#) offers.

“They have all kinds of equipment,” said 84-year-old Cook. “I also enjoy walking around the track.”

Painesville Seniors Executive Director Denise Powell said it has been an effective collaboration.

Membership

Powell said that many of the Painesville Seniors members are supportive and hopeful, but sadly there were some former members who chose not to continue as part of the new collaboration.

There is a dual membership of more than 900 seniors, she said.

“We are using a portion of our levy money to subsidize membership opportunities for our seniors,” she said. “We are still within our one-year memorandum of understanding period and we are still working on how we define our membership in the traditional Y setting.”

Member Engagement Director Suzanne Hall said that the Central YMCA brought in about 130 new members.

Hall said many of the seniors qualify for the free Silver Sneaker membership at the YMCA and those who do not are offered other financial assistance.

“In the seven months that we’ve been here, it has taken leadership from both sides to be active in deciding fees and opportunities to keep members engaged and healthy,” Powell said.

Programming

The collaboration brings members many benefits.

Powell said the seniors have a designated social space at the Y available from about 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday.

“We also still facilitate programs like we always have, such as line dancing and yoga,” she said. “We take trips and have a podiatrist that come in. There are a lot of opportunities that our folks could not have had at the 85 N. Park Place property.”

Additionally, the YMCA offers numerous group fitness classes, water activities and social groups.

Disadvantages

Hall and Powell recognized that the collaboration has been challenging for many seniors.

“I know it’s still an adjustment for a lot of people,” Hall said. “It’s been hard for some people to come to the Y, because it doesn’t feel like a senior center. Another challenge is that although we are handicap accessible at the front entrance, within the building we have several flights of stairs. So if they come for programs, they come in the side entrance downstairs, but to transition upstairs, they need to walk outside and come up the ramp at the front door.”

The seniors are also used to having more space.

“The core group we have is still close and communicate, but it’s 200 square feet versus the 34,000 square feet that they had before,” Powell said.

Future plans

Although Painesville Seniors is pleased with the collaboration with the YMCA, the organization is currently working to develop a long-term solution.

Painesville Seniors is working with Aislinn Consulting, owned by Rita McMahon, former Painesville city manager, to revise its strategic plan.

Powell said they are also grateful for support from Painesville City Manager Monica Ireland and City Council.

She said communication has not ceased with the city to explore other options and they are optimistic about the future.

“Council still says it is their vision to be a collaborator in our long-term existence,” Powell said.

Painesville Seniors also has received monetary donations from community members and organizations such as Laketran and former Judge Elaine Crane.

Powell said she hopes to have a decision about the future of the Painesville Seniors by the end of 2017.

In the meantime, she believes that they will request to extend the agreement with the YMCA to allow more time for developing a long-term strategy.

For more information about Painesville Seniors, visit painesvilleseniors.com