

CHEER center to offer more for seniors (The News Journal)

Nonprofit to build new Greenwood facility as part of effort to serve Sussex retirees

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Evelyn Koehler of Lincoln started coming to the Greenwood CHEER center back in October for the lunches and activities.

But she kept coming back because of the people.

"It was the friendliness of the people. It was close to home. They made you feel welcome," she said.

Now, armed with a \$500,000 low-interest loan from USDA Rural Development and another \$500,000 guaranteed loan from the Bank of Delmarva, the Greenwood CHEER Center off U.S. 13 is getting an updated center, complete with a larger dining area, a bigger kitchen and a fitness center.

The new facility is part of a CHEER Inc. initiative to serve Sussex County's rapidly growing older population.

"Sussex County is a great place to retire," said Arlene Littleton, executive director of the non-profit CHEER Inc. "People are finding that out."

CHEER operates nine centers throughout the county along with other services geared toward an aging population.

But as the population has aged and shifted, CHEER has adapted. Greenwood's center, for instance, has been in at least three other locations over the years.

"Some places that had senior centers 30 years ago are not where people live today," Littleton said. "As we build these new centers, they become the focal point of the community."

Littleton said the new Greenwood center will be a focal point -- serving seniors during the day and open for meetings and receptions in the off-hours.

"Senior centers are the hub of activity for many individuals age 50 and over," said Marlene Elliott Brown, USDA rural development director. "CHEER promotes well-being, fun and fellowship for all who walk through their doors."

Brown said the money for the project comes from an assistance program designed to provide money for essential services in rural communities.

Sussex County has the oldest average population in the state with a median age of 42.4.

"There is a real need in Sussex County for these kinds of services and CHEER is making a difference in the lives of so many seniors," said Rep. Mike Castle, R-Del., who was on hand Tuesday when the loan program was announced.

The new center is off Schulze Road, just behind the present center.

The existing center on U.S. 13 is zoned for commercial use. It is owned by CHEER and is listed for sale at \$600,000, Littleton said.

In addition, through a capital campaign, CHEER raised \$400,000 over the last few months.

The Greenwood Center will be the fifth new facility to come on line for CHEER, she said.

The newer centers accommodate larger groups doing more activities in individual rooms and all of them have fitness centers, she said.

"The whole purpose is to keep as healthy as we can for as long as we can," Littleton said.

