

# Guest commentary: Naples Senior Center is meeting the needs

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Guest commentary

Does the Naples Senior Center meet the needs of seniors in Collier County?

A recent compilation and review of the metrics for 2014 allows us to answer with a resounding "yes."

Not only do we find that the Naples Senior Center provides a venue for addressing the social isolation of our seniors, but it provides a portal for JFCS of Southwest Florida's core services.

At the close of 2014, the senior center, open for 11 months, had 555 members. Not surprisingly, given national demographics, 139 were male and 416 were female. The age distribution is interesting, as well. Three hundred thirty-four (334) members are over the age of 75, with 85 members between the ages of 70 and 74. The smallest percentages, 27 percent, are between the ages of 60 and 64.

We are in the process of completing an in-depth analysis of the financial status of our senior center members, and initial projections lead us to believe that 70 percent are at, slightly above or below the poverty line. This is why we have made the commitment to keep the Naples Senior Center annual membership fee at \$15 per person.

This fee enables members to participate in every program offered, including the weekly hot lunch. Programs, which can be found on our website, are too numerous to mention here but include professionally taught art classes, Spanish class, cards and mahjong, tai chi, chair yoga, topical discussions and computer skills training.

Using a ZIP code analysis, we find that the highest concentration of members is from North Naples, East Naples and Golden Gate.

Since opening its doors in January 2014, the Naples Senior Center has served as a portal to JFCS of Southwest Florida's core programs and services. This is not a surprise, since we know that aging, under the best of circumstances, can create challenges for our senior population.

Physical changes, loss of loved ones and diminishing financial resources can lead to depression and anxiety. Requests for mental health counseling have doubled and JFCS has added a second licensed clinical social worker to the staff to meet the need.

Individuals served by the JFCS food pantry more than doubled in 2014, increasing from 108 to 238. This can be attributed to the high volume of senior center members, and the fact that JFCS is becoming better known in the community.

The World Health Organization estimates that a new case of dementia is diagnosed every four seconds. For JFCS of Southwest Florida, this means that if we are in the business of working with seniors, we are also in the business of providing services to individuals with dementia. Currently, JFCS has two weekly respite programs, one for men with early memory loss and a second for men and women in later states of dementia.

To meet these ever-increasing needs, JFCS is doubling the size of the Naples Senior Center, thanks to a challenge grant provided by the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation and the generosity of our community.

We will be celebrating the success of our first year at a party on Tuesday, giving tours of our construction, and thanking our generous community for making it all happen.

The Naples Senior Center is at 5025 Castello Drive, near Pine Ridge Road and U.S. 41. JFCS is a nonsectarian human service agency. For more information, call 239-325-4444 or go to [www.jfcsswfl.org](http://www.jfcsswfl.org).

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