

YMCA of the Palms: Where active seniors find many fitness and social opportunities

By Rainer Olbrich, Community Contributor

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It is late on a Tuesday morning in early December, and Bob Williams, a septuagenarian, along with 28 older adults, has just concluded another hourly morning fitness class.

“I feel great, I feel that I’m really helping myself,” sighs the YMCA member as he wipes his sweaty brow and smiles at his wife Nicole.

Other smiling and exhausted faces crowd around them. And most of them have been doing it for at least a year or more, and on a regular basis. Seniors like Williams and his wife have decided that they can stay active and healthy by participating in a variety of fitness and social activities of the Y.

Observes Cindy Roorda, who is also the Y’s director of Group Exercise, “I continue to see big improvements in the physical well-being of many of our regular participants.”

The fitness program that many of the seniors attend is called SilverSneakers, one of the most popular programs at the YMCA. It is the nation’s leading exercise program exclusively designed for older adults.

Our YMCA has participated in this program for more than four years. Nearly every morning, SilverSneakers classes are conducted by the Y’s cadre of certified SilverSneakers instructors. This program is so popular that two levels of instructions are offered four days each week — SilverSneakers I (Beginners) and SilverSneakers II (More Advanced) — and year around.

More than 25 people participate at each session on average, increasing to more than 40 during the winter months. All classes are low impact aerobics specifically tailored for individuals who may not have exercised for several years or for those who continue to exercise on a regular

basis. The stated goals of each SilverSneakers class is to encourage illness prevention and minimize age-related physical deterioration, while increasing a sense of well-being through social interaction in a group setting. Instructors focus on improving participants' muscular strength, individual endurance, mobility, flexibility, range of motion, balance, agility and coordination.

Because SilverSneakers is a national program that is encouraged and sponsored by several large health insurance companies throughout the country, including Humana or United Health, many SilverSneakers fitness classes are offered in other parts of the country. Therefore, any member of another YMCA or SilverSneakers-approved facility is invited to visit our local Y at its two locations: the principal facility at 5450 YMCA Road in Naples or the Bonita Springs branch at 27200 Kent Road, while visiting our area. Reciprocal arrangements with such fitness facilities are available as well as seasonal and short-term memberships, at affordable prices.

And, for those seniors not wishing to participate in classes of the group setting, our YMCA offers state-of-the-art gym and swimming facilities at both locations, where individual physical activity can be pursued. Finally, the YMCA also puts on periodic social events for its senior members, ranging from monthly senior potlucks to specialized lectures.

Yuly Valencia, longtime SilverSneakers attendee, notes: "I have made very interesting acquaintances in attending the Y with my husband these past two years."

Many senior Y members and SilverSneakers attendees freely attest that they feel healthier because of their participation in one or more of the physical and social activities of our YMCA. For some, the Y has become the place where they not only improve their fitness levels, but where they can explore new interests and make new friends!

To become a YMCA member, get involved as a volunteer, or make a contribution, call 597-3148 or visit www.ymcapalms.org. Incorporated in 1969, the YMCA of the Palms is a charitable nonprofit organization.

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Rainer Olbrich is a volunteer and longtime member of the Greater Naples YMCA.

