

Growing Older in Fort Collins: Silver Tsunami As a Golden Opportunity
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Summary of speaker presentations

Nancy Luttropp, CEO, OPS Consulting

I was involved in planning the Fort Collins Senior Center from 1986-1990, and I want to tell you how this got started. The original center was on Remington and Mountain and there were 500 participants. I became a delegate to National Institute of Senior Centers, and we spent 4 years discussing what the senior center of the future would look like. West of Mississippi, most were run by Parks & Recreation departments; in the east, it was local agencies on aging and church groups. We needed to decide what kind of standards and guidelines were necessary. Today FCSC is ranked in top 12 in U.S.

In the beginning, our city government was worried about these standards and trends: swimming pool, basketball court, stage, rentable spaces, liquor license, extended hours of operation, fees for services, revenue return to the City. We kept repeating same message from same script. That needs to happen again – you all need to ring the bell, not just staff and volunteers.

Now senior centers are following the 6 dimensions of wellness: physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, volunteering. FCSC is accredited and follows this. The senior center provides a one stop shop for wellness. But not everyone can access it because it's crowded.

Why do we want this? 1) Healthy seniors place less of a drain on services; 2) people come here to Fort Collins and expect a high quality senior center because of our reputation; 3) informed citizens advocate for it.

Future trends: revenue generating, spa services, retail stores; child daycare and adult daycare services for Boomers in the sandwich generation. Allocated space for drop off care so caregivers can take a class here; Internet cafes with printers; large rooms for fitness classes; easy parking; programs for single women – internet dating advice, plastic surgery advice, how to choose an appropriate pet.

Here are the things FCSC does, according to accreditation: health and wellness, arts and humanities, intergenerational activities, employment assistance, information referral services, social and community action opportunities, transportation services, volunteer opportunities, educational opportunities, financial and benefits assistance, meal programs, rental spaces that create revenue.

Questions to ask: If there's no parking, will seniors have easy access to these dimensions of wellness? With the growth of the senior population, how will we manage to do what FCSC currently does without more space? What other org does all this? Is anyone else going to do this at an affordable price? Will older populations

be able to drive all over town to piecemeal their needs? Does anyone doubt that if you're a homebound senior it makes it very difficult for you to contribute to the community? If anyone doubts that there are younger seniors here, just try to get into some of the programs they're attracted to.

In conclusion, we in the field preach this at every speech: You must be an engaged older person. You must be responsible. You cannot retire from life. We need you. We need you on boards, we need you on planning committees. We need you to be healthy. If we say this, we need to provide seniors with a place to do these things. We need to help them out. So can anyone really question if we need an expansion of our senior center? I don't think so.

Barbara Schoenberger, Recreation Supervisor, Fort Collins Senior Center

The senior population in Fort Collins is going to increase 140% in the next 20 years. Baby Boomers are all now 50 and older. There are a ton of us and have always been a ton of us. As we move through time we make a huge impact on things. Getting older is like when we went to school: we all showed up, they all knew we were coming, but then they acted surprised when we got there. Not enough desks, books, paper – had to share it all. Gradually they caught up with us. We don't want this to happen to our retirement years. We want the city to be prepared.

FC has been identified as a prime retirement community. We have received lots of awards. People are moving here – more than any other place in CO – Larimer and Weld counties are attracting more boomers and retired people. Not going to FL and AZ. This is where we want to live out our retirement years. People come back. We're going to have a lot of older people. One quarter of our population will be seniors = immense change. City of Fort Collins wants to be prepared.

FCSC is poised to be supportive as our aging population grows, but we need more space to accommodate more people. In 1995 people flocked here when it opened, no room to expand programming. Spaces are utilized fully. This facility needs to double in size to provide same opportunities in future that we do now. People have different ideas about how they want to spend time – we need to provide variety.

Let me tell you about the initial public process when we built this facility. People of Fort Collins got involved, we spent 5 years collecting data and getting feedback, examining how to create facility to meet needs of community. Excitement grew from there – national recognition, news media, print media, visitors came to Fort Collins. People still come here and say this is an amazing resource. We want to continue that grand tradition.

FCSC is one of the top 12 senior centers in US 1 of 2 accredited in the state of Colorado. We are looked at as being on cutting edge for supporting a healthy and active aging population. BOB passed in 2005., allocating \$5 mil to expansion. First 7 years, 50,000 per year for additional operating. Assumption is to build revenue,

clientele, programming. Want to continue what we do. Need to focus on the services we provide and supporting other service providers. House programs and services for special needs and disabilities.

Today's challenge is to help us to make some decisions about where to go. Limitations: BOB – expansion to this facility, include fitness and parking. 9 acres, 5 developed, 4 available between gym south to the preserve, and may include retrofitting existing space.

Think in terms of what might be. Don't let the possibility of things not being possible enter your mind. What can we do, what can it be, and what can we provide for the people of Fort Collins? Think, dream, plan, and believe.