

## Senior Connections may get own center

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By Fran Memberg

For The Crier

Some senior adults in north DeKalb County are hoping that a new Senior Connections center will open soon in their own backyard. Residents of Dunwoody, Chamblee and surrounding areas attend Senior Connections classes at a temporary site at 5238 Peachtree Road in Chamblee, but they would prefer a center of their own.

Senior Connections provides Meals on Wheels and offers a host of classes, activities and services to DeKalb County senior adults. In addition to the temporary center in Chamblee, Senior Connections operates activity centers in Decatur, DeKalb/Atlanta, Lithonia and Scottdale. Popular classes include tai chi and computer training; services include lunch, nutrition counseling, health screenings, home repair and personal home care supervised by a Registered Nurse and administered by Certified Nursing Assistants.

Subsidized services and classes are available to adults age 62-plus; private pay services and classes are available for people age 55 and older.

A north DeKalb center was located on Johnson Ferry Road near Peachtree Industrial Boulevard until it was torn down during a redevelopment project. Classes, programs and lunches were moved to space in Senior Connections' Chamblee facility where Meals on Wheels are prepared.

Bev Warner, an 80-year-old great-grandmother from Dunwoody, has been going to the Chamblee Center almost every day for five years. She and her husband, Bob, enjoy day trips, lunches and classes offered by Senior Connections, and have become friends with other participants.

"It's a stimulating thing. Every day is a new adventure," said Warner.

Compared to the greater percentage of central and south DeKalb residents who frequent Senior Connections centers in their areas, the number of north DeKalb participants is small.

According to Sally Eggleston, the chief marketing officer, 1,500 DeKalb County residents use Seniors Connections services each quarter. About 170 participants live in north DeKalb communities, including Chamblee, Doraville, Dunwoody and Tucker. That number represents about two percent of the area's senior population, Eggleston said.

"Very few people in Dunwoody have heard of us," said Warner. "It's the best kept secret I've ever heard of."

Evelyn Kennedy, 83, a former mayor of Chamblee and a retired schoolteacher, has been going to the Chamblee center for about one year. She likes the tai chi class and a book club, and sits on the center's site council.

"[Senior Connections] is very important for many people," Kennedy said. "We have been promised a new facility. If it was expanded, many more people could use it."

DeKalb County Commissioner Kathie Gannon, whose district includes Brookhaven, Chamblee, Dunwoody, the Buford Highway corridor and other regions of the county, advocates for a new north DeKalb center through the office of DeKalb County's CEO, Burrell Ellis. When she visits the Chamblee center, "North DeKalb residents say, 'we are long overdue [for a new facility] and when is it coming?'" Gannon said.

The answer may be - soon.

"[DeKalb County] is very close to closing on a property close to the current senior center," Gannon said. About one month from now she expects to convene a meeting with seniors at the Chamblee center to talk about the needs of a new facility.

Senior Connections was created in 1973 by the DeKalb Community Council on Aging with funding from the federal Older Americans Act to provide Meals on Wheels to DeKalb County adults age 62 and above who were in need. Originally serving about 200 people, today 2,500 meals are prepared and delivered daily.

"The need is out there," said Debra Furtado, CEO of Senior Connections. "Eight thousand seniors in DeKalb age 60-plus live below the federal poverty level."

In 1992, the council on aging expanded Meals on Wheels to a regional program. In addition to DeKalb County, it now serves Cobb and Rockdale Counties, the cities of Atlanta and Macon, and residents in a 10-county metro area may participate for a fee.

At the time of the expansion, the aging council's name was changed to Senior Connections. While still receiving federal, state and county funding, fundraising efforts were initiated to generate private donations to provide the many other services now offered by Senior Connections. Services, programs and meals are provided to senior adults ages 62 and above who are in need. Adults 55 and older may participate on a fee-based basis.

The Circle of Friends fundraising arm helps raise private donations that are combined with government funding to meet Senior Connections' \$10 million annual operating budget. Corporate sponsors such as AutoTrader.com in Dunwoody and UPS in Sandy Springs, and area churches such as Dunwoody Baptist, provide volunteer support.

For information about Senior Connections, visit [www.seniorconnectionsatl.org](http://www.seniorconnectionsatl.org) or call (770) 455-7602.

In celebration of National Grandparents Day, Sunday, September 12, honor your grandparents by texting "GRAND" to 20222 on your cell phone to make a \$10 donation to help fund Senior Connections's meal delivery program, in-home care and home repair program. The text campaign goes through September 30.

Donations can also be mailed to Senior Connections, 5238 Peachtree Road, Chamblee, GA 30341.