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Silver Sneakers head to civic center

Local man bicep curls his way to health

By Katrina Cornwell
The News Examiner



James M. Epperson, 74, earned a bronze medal as the third most active participant of the Silver Sneakers program for 2006. Epperson often enjoys the sauna and hot tub, which are part of the pool facilities at the Civic Center. Katrina Cornwell/The News Examiner

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James M. Epperson faithfully works out each week and he's got the medal to prove it.

Epperson, 74, took home the bronze medal in 2006 for being the third most active participant locally in the Silver Sneakers program, which now offers senior citizens across Sumner enrolled in Healthspring or Humana insurance up to 10 free visits to the Gallatin Civic Center each month.

The Gallatin resident's routine three or four times a week involves bicep curls and sit-ups on a weight bench and he enjoys a 15-minute steam session in the sauna and a good soak in the jacuzzi to wind down.

"It takes close to two hours," said Epperson, who schedules his workout time around what he has to do each day.

"My favorite is the hot tub," he said. "I think it helps me; I have arthritis. I have high blood pressure, too, and my weight, because when you get my age, weight becomes a problem."

Gallatin recently signed off on a contract with Axia Health Management, Inc. to offer the Silver Sneakers program at the Civic Center, and now those agreements have been mailed out for the proper signatures from company officials to officially begin the program.

The contract stipulates Axia will pay Gallatin \$3 per person for each visit to the Civic Center for a maximum of 10 visits per person monthly. The terms of that agreement also guarantee the city a minimum monthly payment of \$250 regardless of the number of visits Silver Sneakers participants make to the facility.

"That's just one of the perks of having insurance with (Healthspring and Humana)," said Elaine Hudson, assistant city leisure services director. "You can come to the designated facilities like ours and it's no charge for you.

"Walking helps all of us. They really encourage people to come and use the facility. They want people to be healthy. It's a program they offer and they want people to come and take advantage of it."

While the final details of the agreement are being worked out, the Civic Center is offering Silver Sneakers participants a chance to use the facility for only \$1 per visit.

"They'll have Silver Sneakers cards and we'll scan them on a special scanner," Hudson said. "They can participate in whatever is going on at the Civic Center."

The facility offers a wide range of activities including a fitness room that has a cardio area and weight machines; free weights in a separate weights room; a basketball court; raquetball court; walking track; swimming pool; sauna; and a hot tub.

In addition, the Civic Center offers lost of classes including watersize and aerobics.

Special monthly activities for Silver Sneakers participants are also being planned.

Epperson has lost about 35 pounds over the last seven years, and he's kept it off with a regular exercise regimen he began at the healthplex about 16 years ago, and is now continuing at the Civic Center.

"It's an effort, but you feel better from the effort," Epperson said. "That's what makes you keep doing it."

The retired teacher encourages Silver Sneakers participants who haven't caught on that the program has changed locations to come give the Civic Center a try.

"It's a worthwhile thing to do," Epperson said.

The Civic Center is open 5 a.m.-8 p.m. Mon.-Thurs.; 5 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday; 6 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday; and noon-6 p.m. Sunday.

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