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## Hardly Grandpa's Senior Center

by: Sally Abrahms | March 2, 2012

Last year, for Heidi Bailey's 52nd birthday, her husband Mark surprised her with his and her motorcycles. The mother of three wanted to practice when he was at work, but not alone. So she asked a Harley Davidson manager how she could find riding buddies. He steered her straight to the Lakeville Senior Center in Lakeville, Minn.

Most of Bailey's fellow roadies are in their 70s. "Taking that first step into the senior center was scary," she says. "I thought everyone would be in walkers and wheelchairs, but there are a lot of very active people. It's amazing how much the Center has to offer," she says.

Her next stop: to check out pickleball, a paddle game becoming the rage in some senior centers.

A motorcycle club in a senior center? Yes, and in others, belly dancing, full gymnasiums, personal trainers, book signings, speed dating, workshops on sex, spirituality, money, caregiving, and downsizing, wine tastings, aging and wellness coaching, nutrition and core strength classes, ceramic studios, lectures by heavyweights in business, politics, and the arts, and computer classes to learn blogging, Twitter, LinkedIn, and resume writing.

But the best part, say some younger converts, is not having to lift weights or work out next to a buff 20-something body!

Of course, most senior centers, at least so far, appeal to the "old-old" rather than the "young-old." But many centers are trying to attract both demographics.

Here's the modern strategy: Get boomers in that senior center door with a hot offering or service they need for themselves or their parents. Once they look around and see all there is, hook them!

Ohio's Wood County Committee on Aging in Ohio advertises on Facebook, in print and on the radio to snag younger prospects. At a recent "pub crawl" (appetizer at one location, dinner and dessert at another) sponsored by the senior center, one-third of participants were boomers.

Compared to hefty monthly health club memberships that can be as much as \$90 per month, senior centers are a bargain. The winner: Minnesota's Lakeville Senior Center, soon to move to bigger digs and be renamed the Heritage Center, charges just \$9 per year for a single membership or \$16 a year per couple.

The Summit in Grand Prairie, Texas, bills itself as "The Premier 50+ Club." Its 5700 members range from ages 50 to 102. The city-owned facility wanted a place that didn't shout, "You must be old!" The lobby has twenty overstuffed, leather chairs and a café that serves wine, beer, and cappuccino. There are outdoor concerts on the lawn, Thursday night dances, laptops to borrow, and an indoor theater that reels in moviegoers as well as health and wellness experts.

Another non-senior center concept is **Mather's—More Than a Café** in three Chicago neighborhoods. It offers a public restaurant open to all ages, but you must be age 55 or older to take classes or use other facilities.

The Mather's Café model has been replicated in close to twenty places in the U.S., and Japanese and Korean experts have traveled to Chicago to check it out.

*Dear Boomer, what would it take for you to go to a senior center? Or, regardless of the offerings, would you say, "over my dead body"? Please share!*

*For more information about Mather LifeWays Café Plus, visit [www.matherlifeways.com/cafeplus](http://www.matherlifeways.com/cafeplus).*