

Director gives sneak peek at senior center

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Members of the Olivia Haydel Senior Center are more than ready to celebrate the grand opening of a \$1 million, 5,000-square-foot expansion paid for by a special purpose local option sales tax approved by voters nearly four years ago.

"We just can't wait for it to happen," senior center Director Jackie Lunsford said about the open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony May 19 at 5:30 p.m. "It's getting closer and closer."

At the event attendees can see the transformation, created by Conyers-based firms Design Associates Architects and The Potts Co., including a dining hall double its original size.

"Once we opened it up," Tom Seim, Potts project superintendent, said about unveiling a mirror image of the dining hall where an exterior wall once stood, "everybody came in and it was, like, 'Wow.' It was fun to see their expressions."

It was fun working on the project, he said, despite the challenge of retrofitting a building in use Monday through Friday by up to 300 senior center members.

"Ladies came up to me and said, 'We're praying for you, that you don't get hurt,'" Seim said, adding that between the prayers and Potts' safety program the crew is accident-free. "They are the most appreciative people."

Ms. Lunsford said the seniors already appreciate — and avidly anticipate — the chance to use new features such as an indoor porch, a 40-foot by 30-foot dance studio, an exercise room and a regulation-size pool table.

"Pool championships are part of the Georgia Golden Olympics," Ms. Lunsford said. "Some members are interested in entering the state games. You have to have a nine-foot table to practice on."

Every inch of the nine-foot table was financed by the seniors themselves, Ms. Lunsford said, not public funds.

"Through donations and fundraising we were able to purchase all the exercise equipment, the pool table and the decorations," she said. "The seniors all helped."

The community also pitched in, Ms. Lunsford said.

"If it's in here, we got a discount," she said about framed prints, lamps and other finishing touches. "Once people knew it was for the senior center, they helped us out."

Other features of the expansion include an airlock entrance lobby, 22 more parking spaces, a covered entrance for Meals on Wheels volunteers, two additional restrooms and a 100 percent increase in kitchen storage space.

The senior center is located at 1240 Dogwood Drive. Hours after the grand opening will be Monday through Thursday from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and Friday from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Residents 50 and older may join.

Information: (770) 922-4633.