

Valley Voice: Senior centers vital as coronavirus threatens Coachella Valley's older citizens

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Friends play cards at the Joslyn Senior Center on Friday, July 8, 2016 in Palm Desert. (Photo: Richard Lui/The Desert Sun)

"I'm here to keep my mind active and stay in touch with friends."

This sentiment can be heard in every senior center in our valley every day. That is why we are here.

Jack Newby (Photo: Louis Falzarano)

Programs and services in local senior centers are designed to keep low-income older adults active and engaged in their community and to support physical and mental health. Today, members and residents who rely on their local senior center are seeing their social and support networks disappear almost overnight because of COVID-19 (coronavirus).

They are afraid, lonely, isolated and without their trusted resources in an environment of fear and panic. Just a few days ago, a woman who is in a grief recovery group that was cancelled called in tears trying to find resources. She is grieving, alone and scared with

nowhere to turn for a trusted resource.

This is a recipe for tragedy.

In 2019, the National Institute on Aging published an article linking social isolation and loneliness to higher risks for high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, anxiety, depression, Alzheimer's disease and even death. "People who find themselves unexpectedly alone due to the death of a spouse or partner, separation from friends or family, ... are at particular risk."

In a 2019 study, The American Psychological Association found that lack of social connection among older adults heightens health risks as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Wes Winter (Photo: Courtesy)

The Coachella Valley is at the epicenter of a rapidly growing senior population. Riverside County is among the fastest growing counties with a projected growth of those over age 60 up to 97% by 2030.

Recent local reports (Health Assessment and Research for Communities) estimated that there are approximately 130,000 individuals who are age 65 and older in the Coachella Valley, representing over 30% of the total population as compared to the state, where the percentage is only 13%.

This is why your local senior centers are so vital and necessary for your community. We provide nutritional services on a daily basis for our members throughout the Coachella Valley. We provide exercise, social and recreational activities that contribute to improved health and opportunities for socialization and combating loneliness.

Geoff Corbin (Photo: J. SINCLAIR)

Senior centers are crucial to the physical and mental health of thousands of your neighbors, many you see every day.

With the onset of COVID-19, these resources are almost gone. For many of our members, it is like the sudden death of their closest friend. The very survival of our senior centers is now in jeopardy. This is especially true for the non-profit centers that rely heavily on donations, activity fees, and fundraisers to continue offering services.



In just a few days, these sources of income have essentially disappeared. The Joslyn Center, Mizell Center, and Cathedral City Senior Center are the local nonprofit centers that have been brutally affected by this virus and have been in crisis mode with daily and sometimes hourly changes on how to protect the health of our members and guests while still providing crucial resources, strong social networks, and support for physical and mental health.

To weather this crisis, we remind you of the importance of local senior centers in our area where seniors are a large segment of our population and we sincerely ask for your support.

Jack Newby (jackn@joslyncenter.org) is executive director of The Joslyn Center; Wes Winter (wesw@mizell.org) is executive director of the Mizell Center and Geoff Corbin (geoff@cathedralcenter.org) is executive director of the Cathedral City Senior Center.

