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DeSoto adding senior services

YMCA, city, developers add programs, facilities

By **Toni Lepaska**

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Olive Branch's older citizens aren't content to sit back and reminisce about their youth.

They aren't finished with life.

They are grabbing their sneakers, their car keys and getting together for fitness and fun.

The YMCA took notice of them -- 25 percent of the membership is 55 years old and older. And so the JOY Club was born.

The name is a proclamation. JOY stands for Just Older Youth. About 75 are registered. For them, getting older doesn't mean slowing down.

They meet for lunch the first Tuesday of every month, a social the third Friday of every month and weekly in the Silver Sneakers exercise class.

"We always had wanted to be somewhere for swimming," said Carol Jean Fiedler, 68, a member with husband Phil, former overseas missionaries who grew up on farms. "We're active, so we wanted to continue."

Through its American Community Survey, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated DeSoto County's 65-and-older population in 2005 at 12,519, a 31.3 percent increase over 2000.

According to more recent census survey estimates, those 55 and older make up 17.9 percent of the county's population.

"It's our fastest growing population in Olive Branch," said Darlene Cunningham, the Y's program director. "It's a growing trend."

The city took notice. It's building a senior citizens center.

The 10,000-square-foot building, under construction near the parks and recreation office off Miss. 305, is expected to be finished in the fall. Golden Branches, another group for older citizens, plans to meet there.

The development community also took notice of the numbers.



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Harold McKeel of Horn Lake speaks to the JOY Club at the Olive Branch YMCA about his missionary trips to Ghana with the Church of Christ.

From time to time at the Olive Branch Board of Aldermen, developers seeking approval for subdivisions have highlighted their desire to market the homes to older citizens.

The Kemmons Wilson Cos. has launched marketing of an "active adult" community, The Oaks at Parkview, near the YMCA in Olive Branch.

Judy Alderson, 63, looked forward to growing older because of all the activities offered these days to that segment of the population.

"I've been out here 24 years," said the JOY Club member. "There's a lot of things going on for the older citizens. I had to get old enough to be in these things."

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