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Ranch residents' gift builds new senior center

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SAN DIEGO — The Gary and Mary West Senior Wellness Center, funded by Rancho Santa Fe residents Gary and Mary West, opened its doors April 21 at 1525 Fourth Ave.

The Senior Community Centers organization received a \$3 million gift from the Gary and Mary West Foundation to make the collective vision a reality.

The facility is bright, colorful, energy-efficient and dispels the notion that a senior facility has to be boring. It was designed to feel more like a thriving college campus than the stereotypical senior center. As baby boomers reach retirement age and San Diego's cost of living continues to rise, Senior Community Centers has seen a dramatic increase in the number of low-income seniors seeking services.

The new Gary and Mary West Senior Wellness Center will transform the traditional senior center concept into a vibrant hub of innovative services that help seniors prolong independence, enhance quality of life and promote overall health and well-being.

The new community center includes a nutrition center capable of serving up to 500 meals a day. It also features a center for healthy aging, offering seniors access to medical and mental health care, case management and referrals to partners in the aging network.

A partnership with San Diego State's College of Health and Human Services will provide an interdisciplinary "learning laboratory" to help students better understand the importance of providing an integrated system of care for older adults in order to achieve optimal health and well-being.

Classes will be offered through the John M. Sachs lifelong learning institute, including crafts, cooking, fitness and photography. A cyber café will also be open, an intergenerational experience where seniors will learn how to use a computer and receive on-line training conducted by at-risk high school students. Seniors will learn how to access their medical history and obtain health benefits information online.

The center will also house a civic engagement program that will assess seniors' skills and abilities and match them with meaningful volunteer opportunities in the community.

For more information, visit www.servingseniors.org.

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