

Kathleen Martin is an attorney with O'Donnell, Weiss & Mattei, P.C., and a newspaper columnist for The Mercury, which gave permission for this article to be reprinted.

March 20, 2016

Trend of senior centers to try re-branding

The Pottstown Senior Center has changed their name after 40 years to the “TriCounty Active Adult Center” in preparation for their move to the new facility on Moser Road. A recent email blast from the newly named TriCounty Active Adult Center indicated that they decided to change their name, or re-brand, after more than a year of surveys, conversations with members, participants, volunteers and funders. The Center wants to be sure that all older adults feel welcome no matter where they live (in Pottstown or in Chester or in Berks County) and whether or not the older adult thinks of himself or herself as a “senior.”

A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* indicates that re-branding senior centers is a trend across the country (www.wsj.com/articles/to-lure-baby-boomers-senior-centers-try-rebranding-1447381963). The reasons given are similar to what the TriCounty Active Adult Center gives as the reasons to re-brand the Pottstown Senior Center. Baby boomers, that generation of adults who are turning 65 at an estimated rate of 10,000 people per day, often find old-age labels and conventions to be unappealing. As the former Pottstown Senior Center says, they are changing their name and website but not their programs, staff, and their “dedication to helping older adults to live longer, fuller, more independent lives.” They are also working on expanding services to attract more older adults to the Center.

However, according to the article in *The Wall Street Journal*, the reaction to re-branding is mixed. Some senior centers, such as the Ellicott City Senior Center outside Baltimore, have had some success with a name change. They renamed the senior center as the “Ellicott City 50+ Center” and opened a new fitness wing with classes in Zumba and Power Yoga. This has attracted some younger retirees who thought that the center was only for “old people.” The fees from the fitness classes can help fund more low or no-cost activities for the more senior members.

On the other hand, attempts to change the name or re-brand have fallen flat in other cities. The city of Lafayette, Colorado reamed its Senior Services Center to “GO Services” for “Grown-up Opportunities.” Seniors spoke out at public meetings and ultimately the city reversed itself and changed the name back to “Senior Services.” Seniors in Rochester have fought the loss of the word “senior” in the title of their Center since they are “senior citizens and proud of it.” The new name of the Rochester Center, “125 Live” sounds condescending to some.

Boomers have continued to be a tough sell despite the name changes. The Centers who have re-branded hope to draw in new membership among younger people (don’t call them seniors) but time will tell.

In the meantime, check out the newly re-branded TriCounty Active Adult Center soon to open on Moser Road in Pottstown. Senior Centers are not just for “seniors” any more but it is important that senior citizens who think of themselves as senior still feel welcome.