

My Father-In-Law was pretty mad. Early in my marriage to Jen he called and was quite upset about something that happened that day. It seems he went into a restaurant and was offered the Senior Discount! Yes, this was the first time anyone had looked at him and offered the discount. The horror! He was not happy at all. Now flash forward a few years and he and my Mother-In-Law actively seek out restaurants that offer the Senior Discount. It seems acceptance has occurred and so has looking for ways to embrace and, yes, take advantage of aging.

NCCC serves so many different groups of people from all walks of life. Many times in this column I have talked about our 16 and 17 year old high school students taking classes through the concurrent enrollment program. I've also discussed the non-traditional students in their 30s and 40s learning what they need for a second career. I've also talked about our traditional 18-26 year old students with their changing needs and expectations. But there is one very important demographic that utilizes the college very heavily and that we are proud to serve – our senior citizens.

The College is very proud of the many services we offer specifically for our older patrons. Some of these services are quite popular! Every Thursday during the fall and spring semesters, Great Western Dining offers lunch at a reduced price to seniors. Some 70-90 of our older patrons enjoy this lunch with us every week. Believe me, I have never heard a complaint from them about the quality of the food that Great Western serves. This has become quite a tradition for seniors as groups of friends eat together and share stories of the week. It is also wonderful that our traditional 18-24 year old students interact with the seniors every week in a positive way.

On Tuesday mornings we offer free coffee and donuts to seniors in the dining hall. That's a pretty good discount. Free is my favorite expense. This service is very generously sponsored by Heritage Health Care. On behalf of the seniors who are enjoying this – thanks Heritage!

We offer free regular tuition and fees to Neosho County residents who are 62 and up. That's right. Seniors can take most classes for free. (There are a few classes with an extra course fee due to the expensive nature of offering that class.) This particular senior discount can do you more good than 10% off at the restaurant. We are all concerned about dementia and Alzheimer's disease affecting us in later years. Studies have shown that those who actively learn new things and form new connections in the brain stave off these debilitating mental health conditions significantly longer than those who do not. We have many seniors taking a wide range of classes learning all kinds of new things. Some seniors opt to audit these classes so they don't have to take tests or do the assignments. Others want the full learning experience so they do the same work as the regular students. In fact, a few years ago we had the oldest graduate ever at NCCC!

We have even designed special classes with seniors in mind called Lifetime Learning courses. Here you can take classes in American film, US history, senior fitness, basic computers, Wichita Summer Musical Series (very popular!), even classes in writing your memoirs. Sandy Robb coordinates these and other similar courses and would love to sign you up.

Seniors get in to all NCCC activities with a free Silver Panther card available through our NCCC Foundation office. You can attend the theatre productions, sporting events, and all activities just

by showing the card. With our many events there is always something happening at the college to attend!

Still other seniors enjoy walking our campus, whether it is outside on our many loops of sidewalks, or inside our gymnasium during special time reserved for our older patrons.

Many take advantage of free computer and internet usage through our Chapman Library or in the Internet Café in the Student Union which is open to all of the public, not just seniors.

Other seniors want to get involved and help the College and the community directly. I certainly appreciate these folks! NCCC is a recipient of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) that helps connect these community-minded folks with good causes. It is the largest volunteer organization for those 55 and older, boasting over 500,000 members. And we have a chapter right here at NCCC! Patty Allen coordinates that grant and helps seniors find ways to contribute to the community. For example, recently a group of RSVP volunteers spoke to a high school government class about the importance of voting. What a great way to get involved!

Some volunteer directly with the college through a program called NCCC Lifetime Learning Ambassadors. These folks help with many events, such as Move-In Day for new students, our blood drives, special ballgames, etc. Just recently they helped hand out Halloween candy to our pre-school trick-or-treaters who come to campus every year. It is a wonderful way to stay active and offer help where it is needed. I am very grateful to this group of seniors!

One may not like getting older, but it is better than the alternative, as the old saying goes. Neosho County Community College is proud to offer so many ways to stay active, get involved and enjoy the best time of your life.

I do want to invite you to a special event that is open to people of all ages – the NCCC Tree Lighting Ceremony! We recently completed a new road from 10th to Allen with a special drop off loop for the library. In the center of that loop is a fourteen foot tall Colorado Spruce generously donated by the College's Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. We hope to start a new tradition of lighting this tree every year after Thanksgiving. Please join us at the tree at 5:10 pm, Wednesday, November 28th. We hope to have Vocal Plus from Royster Middle School as our musical guests and there will be a reception afterward in the Chapman Library. Let's get the holidays started!

As always I welcome your thoughts and comments at binbody@neosho.edu.