



Photos by Jerry Lara / San Antonio Express-News

Doris Griffin (right) visits with Maria Diaz, a member of the Northwest Side center for senior citizens named for Griffin. The one-stop center, which opened in January 2015, serves more than 5,000 people age 60 and older.

Griffin's work cheered

Senior citizens advocate visits center named for her

By Vincent T. Davis
STAFF WRITER

No one stirred at the sound of clacking pool balls at the Doris Griffin Senior One-Stop Center recently, but heads turned when the namesake of the center walked into the building to check on their well-being.

Wearing a purple outfit and high-heel shoes, Griffin held out her arms as members clustered around the longtime advocate for seniors as if she were a Hollywood celebrity. Maria Diaz, 62, sidled up for a photo with Griffin, whom she thanked for always looking out for San Antonio's older residents.

"That lady, we love her!" Diaz said to passers-by.

Diaz is among the first wave of seniors who have flocked to the 22,000-square-foot center since it opened in January 2015. Located in District 7, at 6157 N.W. Loop 410, it's one of nine comprehensive senior centers the city has built for people 60 and older.

The health and wellness center close to Ingram Mall is open from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Fitness instructor Heather Stanley leads an aerobics class at the one-stop health and wellness center at Ingram Park Plaza. Exercise classes there have led to substantial weight loss for some.

Monday through Friday. The city and the WellMed Charitable Foundation collaborated to create the site that offers a range of free services.

Each day, 200 to 350 people

visit the Northwest Side center to use workout equipment, do tai chi and yoga, use computers to get on the internet, eat healthy lunches and enjoy camaraderie with other mem-

bers.

"This gives them something to do; they're not isolated," Griffin said. "They come and make lifelong friends here."

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City Council voted unanimously to name the center after Griffin, a champion of rights and quality-of-life issues for older residents.

She's served multiple terms as a member of the Texas Silver Haired Legislature, a nonprofit group made up of people 60 and older. For the past 25 years, Griffin has been the executive director of Jefferson Outreach for Seniors, which provides transportation for homebound seniors, mobile meals and grocery delivery services.

Supervisor Peaches Hall escorted Griffin through the center that was abuzz about her visit.

Hall brought Griffin to the theater room, where they've had standing-room-only sessions that were both educational and humorous. Members have come for classes on aging, diabetes and one titled "The Prostate and That Damn Blue Pill."

"Everybody that comes in here, we try to wrap our arms around them," Hall said. "When you don't have them, you lose a part of society. Coming here helps them stay relevant."

Sylvia Hickman, 60, Juana Pang, 64, and Wanda Webb, 66, cheered when Griffin made a corner shot at their pool table. She looked into classrooms where members strummed guitars, painted works of art and worked their bodies to



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Doris Griffin checks out a guitar theory class during a visit to the 22,000-square-foot Doris Griffin Senior One-Stop Center at 6157 N.W. Loop 410, near the Ingram Park Mall.

"They're not isolated. ... They come and make lifelong friends here."

Doris Griffin, about the senior health and wellness center named for her

high-energy rhythms.

As they walked into the mirrored exercise room, the fitness instructor, Heather Stanley, led members through a regimen that has resulted in up to a 60-pound weight loss for some. Not long ago, Julia Scott,

60, used a walker, but now, after months in Stanley's class, she moves without it.

JJ Villarreal, 75, also blossomed when he enrolled at the center.

At first he kept to himself, burying his head in a newspaper. But eventually the retired entrepreneur was drawn to the theater group, and even a flash mob. He said that last year, after doctors removed a kidney, he was back a week later, playing pingpong.

Maricristina Alonzo didn't hold back her tears when she

approached Griffin in Hall's exercise class. Alonzo, 70, and her husband, Manuel, were among the first members at the center. She said the center helped her overcome her pain when her husband died in January.

"I don't know you, but I wanted to thank you!" she said. "This place saved my life. I'm so grateful to you."

"Thank you, honey," Griffin replied, grasping Alonzo's hand, "thank you."

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