

GREENWOOD DEMOCRAT

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Betty Wilkinson Senior Activity Center opens

Tuesday, June 27, 2006 11:11 AM CDT

The sign in front of the building says it all: Betty Wilkinson Senior Activity Center. The Sebastian Retired Citizens Association's (SRCA) new home, once the home office of Farmers Bank, is now officially open, thanks to the ceremonies held Sunday. Elizabeth "Betty" Wilkinson, for whom the Senior Center is named, is a prime example of an active senior who still serves as Chairman of the Board of the Wilkinson Holding Corporation and Farmers Bank.

SRCA Board Chairman and Fort Smith Mayor Ray Baker welcomed the crowd to the facility that will now double the capacity of the SRCA in the Greenwood area and will also house the SCRA board of directors' corporate offices.

Following the invocation, Greenwood Mayor Garry Campbell introduced representatives from the City of Greenwood, Sebastian County Quorum Court and other dignitaries involved in making the center a reality for Greenwood. "We are pleased that the renovations to this building will accommodate so many of our senior citizens," he said. "We are so appreciative to them for everything they have done for our community and we are grateful to have them with us today."

Arkansas State Senator and Farmers Bank President Ed Wilkinson spoke on behalf of the Wilkinson Family and noted their pride in the selection of their mother as the building's namesake.

"We recognize and appreciate the accomplishments of the past that took place right here," Wilkinson said. "My mother, Betty Wilkinson, spent almost her entire banking career right here where we are standing today. Professionally, she blazed the trail for women in the banking industry, and she also raised four children and served in numerous business and professional organizations. Additionally, she now enjoys volunteering at the William J. Clinton Presidential Library and School of Public Service in Little Rock. This Senior Activity Center truly bears the name of a remarkable woman."

Wilkinson mentioned many of the notable benchmarks of the bank and explained how it has continued to grow and prosper for nearly a century.

"We have recognized the past memories and successes that have taken place here and with great anticipation look to the future, as this building helps serve a new role in the community - providing a home away from home for hundreds of senior citizens. We hope this center will become a place in which friends will have fellowship with each other and share meals together; a place where individuals will



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get together to experience the joys in their lives and become a community of senior citizens. In short, a place of unity," he said. "As the psalmist said in verse 133, 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for people to dwell together in unity.'"

Later, brothers Norman and Stanhope and sister Susan Wilkinson joined Ed to present the SRCA with a portrait of their mother that will hang in the lobby of the senior center. The portrait was taken at the Clinton Presidential Library, where Betty Wilkinson was honored last year as one of 40 volunteers among a pool of 500 who volunteered more than 200 service hours.

Darlene Grandstaff, Director of SRCA, made a special presentation to Jerry Dodd, the founder of the seniors' center more than 30 years ago. Additionally, she recognized SRCA Volunteer and Charter Member Connie Woods. Ms. Woods joined the organization when it began in 1976 and continues to give her time and talent on a regular basis, according to Grandstaff.

The Betty Wilkinson Senior Activity Center will serve anyone who is 60 or older and his/her spouse. SCRA also as-sists the elderly who are homebound and/or handicapped by facilitating the Meals on Wheels program and providing transportation. In recent years, the SRCA has focused finding activities to challenge their members in a meaningful way.

"In this new facility we plan to focus on health and wellness programs," Grandstaff explained. "We will have an expanded exercise program among other things and will look to people like Betty Wilkinson to set good examples as active seniors."

The mural of Greenwood in 1907, a prominent feature of the former Farmers Bank location, remains in place, now enhanced by special lighting as the building's entrance focal point. Building renovations included adding a kitchen to the former bookkeeping department, enlarging what was once a computer room into a recreational room with pool tables, installing expanded bathroom facilities and opening up the lobby area to serve as the dining hall.

Greenwood City Council Members David Purifoy and Jerry Carter worked to coordinate the renovation efforts with assistance from Area Agency on Aging Director Jim Medley of Fort Smith.

In August of 2005, Farmers Bank announced that it agreed to donate the use of the building, located at 125 West Center Street, to the City of Greenwood through a 15 year, long-term lease. The seniors' center is a joint effort of the City of Greenwood, the Sebastian County Quorum Court and the Sebastian County government, who will pay Farmers a symbolic \$1 per year lease through 2020 in exchange for the building. Working together, the entities provided more than \$100 thousand dollars in funds for the renovations, taxes, and insurance for the facility.

Farmers Bank has been a strong supporter of Sebastian County seniors through its sponsorship of the Western Arkansas Senior Organization (WASO) tournament and their Senior Olympics in the past.

Farmers Bank is a family-owned bank with more than \$200 million in assets operating under its original 1907 charter from the State of Arkansas. Farmers opened a new 33,000 square foot home office in May 2004, just one block from the Greenwood Town Square, the site of the original bank. Using the tagline "an old tradition for a new generation", the bank also opened new branches in Huntington and Mansfield in 2004, giving them a total of eight branch locations in Sebastian and Scott Counties. Farmers added a ninth branch last month by purchasing the Barling Branch of the Community Bank of Paris. A tenth branch location will open in Lavaca on July 3. More information about Farmers Bank is available by calling (479) 996-4171 or by visiting the bank's website at www.farmersbankandtrust.com.

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