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Plans unveiled for center

By Janet Keller, SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT
 Tuesday, October 25, 2005 3:39 PM CDT

The crowd  Farmers Bank President Ed Wilkinson, Darlene Grandstaff, Director of Sebastian County Retired Citizens Association and Elizabeth 'Betty' Wilkinson, for whom the new building will be named, are shown with an award presented to Mrs. Wilkinson in appreciation for everything she does for the seniors and center.

unveiled for the renovation of the former Farmers Bank Home Office into the Betty Wilkinson Senior Citizens' Center, the new seniors' center under the direction of the Sebastian County Retired Citizens Association.

Representatives from the City of Greenwood, Sebastian County, Farmers Bank and the Sebastian County Retired Citizens Association (SRCA) were all present to hear architects describe plans for the building and show drawings of the new facility. The tour included a walk-through of the building, along with descriptions of how the areas will be reconfigured to accommodate Greenwood's seniors.

"We are very anxious to get the renovation underway on this building," Greenwood Mayor Garry Campbell told the crowd that included many seniors who will use the building after it is completed. "Anything we can do to show our appreciation to our seniors is beneficial to us all. They have given so much to our community over the years and it is with pride that we join with these other groups to make this center a reality."

In August, Farmers Bank announced that it had agreed to donate the use of the building, located at 124 West Center Street, to the City of Greenwood through a 15-year, long-term lease. 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.

As a special highlight of the tour, an award was presented to Farmers Bank by Darlene Grandstaff, Director of SRCA. In making the presentation Grandstaff cited Farmers "ongoing commitment to the seniors' programs and in particular, the effort and assistance provided by the bank to use the former home office to facilitate Greenwood's seniors."

In accepting the award Farmers Bank President Ed Wilkinson reminded the crowd of his family's roots to the Greenwood community. "We are pleased to see Greenwood continue to grow and this is just one more step toward making this great community an even finer place to live," he said.



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Index	Last Trade	Change
NASDAQ	2112.57	-7.73 ↓
SP 500	1202.28	-4.73 ↓
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AMEX	1650.42	-6.20 ↓
NYSE	7422.22	-10.90 ↓
30 YR BOND	47.69	0.14 ↑

Nov 1, 2005 3:37 PM ET
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Elizabeth "Betty" Wilkinson, for whom the Senior Center will be named, was also on hand during the tour today. She noted her gratitude to the people of Greenwood and Sebastian County for their dedication to make the community Arkansas' finest.

Many SCRA clients participated in the tour, including SCRA Volunteer and Charter Member Connie Woods, who joined the organization when it began in 1976 and continues to give her time and talent on a regular basis, according to Grandstaff.

"We wanted to recognize the people we are going to serve," Grandstaff added. "They are really looking forward to this move and wanted to see what awaits them."

Officials noted that the project will take an estimated 150 working days to complete. On completion, it will serve anyone who is 60 or older and his/her spouse. SCRA also assists the elderly who are homebound and/or handicapped by facilitating the Meals on Wheels program and providing transportation. In recent years, the Sebastian County Retired Citizens Association has focused on finding activities to challenge their members in a meaningful way.

"In our new facility we will focus on health and wellness programs," Grandstaff explained. "We will have an expanded exercise program among other things."

The seniors' center is a joint effort of the City of Greenwood, which will pay Farmers a symbolic \$1 per year lease through 2020 in exchange for the building, the Sebastian County Quorum Court and the Sebastian County government. Working together, the entities will provide more than one-hundred thousand dollars in funds for the renovations, taxes, and insurance for the facility.

SCRA will double its capacity and ability to serve area seniors. Grandstaff anticipates that many seniors will soon consider the facility their "second home." Additionally, the agency and its board of directors will move their corporate offices from Fort Smith to Greenwood.

The mural of Greenwood in 1907, a prominent feature of the former Farmers Bank location, will remain in place and will be enhanced by special lighting to become the building's entrance focal point. Building renovations include adding a kitchen to the former bookkeeping department and enlarging what was once a computer room into a recreational room with pool tables. The building will be remodeled with the assistance of Gordon Guest of the Guest Reddick architectural firm of Fort Smith.

City Council Member David Purifoy is working with the various agencies to coordinate the efforts, with assistance from County Member Jerry Carter and Area Agency on Aging Director Jim Medley of Fort Smith.

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. A ninth branch location will open in 2006 in Lavaca.

More information from Farmers Bank is available by calling (479) 996-4171 or by visiting the bank's website at www.farmersbankandtrust.com.

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