

Your New (Used) Facility: Why Some Senior Centers are Moving into Old Buildings

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In Grand Rapids, MI, a 19th century schoolhouse was restored as a state-of-the-art Senior Computer Learning Center. In Neptune, NJ, an abandoned Rite Aid will be transformed into a multi-purpose senior center. And in Philadelphia, PA, an old church and warehouse are being renovated to accommodate daily meals, a fitness center, computer training, and classrooms for older adults...

It's not unusual for senior centers to exist in made-over versions of buildings originally constructed for other purposes – as many as seventy percent of senior centers nation-wide started out as something different. At a time when unprecedented numbers of centers are exploring their options for a new facility, “used” buildings continue to come under consideration, and with good reason:

- They are often found in highly desirable, central locations, and may be tied in meaningful ways to the history and identity of the community.
- Re-use is green. When we reuse an empty building (and thus avoid having to construct a new one from scratch), we conserve natural resources and reduce blight in the urban landscape.
- These projects often present a cost and time effective alternative to new construction.

The Crawford County Commission on Aging has studied the pro's and con's of renovating the Grayling Fish Hatchery for use as a senior center, and found it to be an appealing, viable option. The central, scenic location and historic building offer an attractive backdrop and sound structure for the new senior center. The interior spaces will be entirely reconfigured to meet specific functional objectives tied to the organization's mission, current programs, and future vision. As design proceeds, the diverse needs, preferences, and abilities of the organization's clients and staff will be reflected in details that support accessibility and user-friendliness throughout the building. Parking areas and walkways will be designed for safety and ease of access, and to encourage full use of the spacious, attractive site and adjacent park. Upon completion, the community will have preserved a valuable landmark while creating a vibrant new senior center for today and tomorrow.