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## **April Newsletter: Education - HEALTH - Income**

### **Brookings Activity Center**

"The Brookings Activity Center is a place for seniors to come together, socialize, and meet people of common interests," said Activity Center Specialist, Traci Saugstad.



One of the goals of the Brookings Activity Center is to keep their members active. Staying active is an important component of staying healthy. One of the ways this happens is thru the introduction of a Tai Chi class. Tai Chi offers many health benefits for all age groups. The Activity Center wanted to introduce a course designed specifically for seniors. The purpose of introducing this type of healthy lifestyle course was to provide a new opportunity for seniors to develop not only on physical health, but benefit for the social mental, emotional, and spiritual health as well. Tai Chi was chosen because it can benefit seniors that have a wide variety of physical abilities.

"We had one of our senior members attend the Tai Chi on a regular basis and had many physical benefits for the class. But far and above she noted her increase in balance. Before taking this course she had not had the confidence she has now. Balance and flexibility problems are common among older adults. Joint pain and stiffness caused her to feel a little unsteady on her feet at times. Poor balance increased her risk of falls that could have led to bone fractures. Tai Chi with its series of poses comprising of slow movements, improved her balance and flexibility. Joints that move more smoothly improved her function in a variety of activities of daily living like picking up items off of the floor, cooking a meal or dressing and bathing. Due to taking the class she has more confidence and higher quality of life due to increased balance and performing daily tasks that she had once previously enjoyed," says Saugstad.

The Brookings Activity center strives to offer many types of activities and range from low impact aerobics to a line-dancing group. Another popular activity is the Monday night dances. This activity is open to anyone in the community, is good exercise for those that like to dance, and feature live music weekly. It's a great way to socialize and have fun! The dances starts at 7:00pm and end at 10:30pm. The calendar changes but each afternoon consist of people shooting pool, some playing card games such as bridge and fan-favorite, pinochle. "We have a very competitive Wii bowling league as well," comments Saugstad.

**For more information or to volunteer, contact Traci at 605.692.4492.**

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## Brookings Special Olympics

The heart and mission of the Brookings Special Olympics is to improve the athlete's social, physical, and mental well being.

The First International Special Olympics Games were organized in 1968 at Soldier Field in Chicago. The enthusiasm spread from Chicago to South Dakota, and in 1968 the 125 athletes participated in the First Annual Special Olympics South Dakota Summer Games. Since then the number of athletes, number of activities, and number of volunteers has increased substantially. Coaches Suzy Gehring and Jessie Kuechenmeister are the frontrunners for the Brookings Special Olympics, and are in charge of lining everything up and making sure everything is running smoothly. "I have been coaching for 23 years and the changes in those 23 years are amazing," said coach, Suzy Gehring.



Although competitors to be at least eight to compete, athletes can start training as early as age two in their Young Athletes program which includes ages two to six.

"We want them engaged and active when they're young so that they continue on throughout their life," said Gehring. "This is the time they learn."

Young Athletes is a program that anyone can be a part of. It takes place after school twice a week and is offered at no cost to the individual. It's a program where, "We just play," said Gehring. "We introduce them to dribbling a basketball, running, swimming, and bowling. It's a wide range of activities."

There are currently 14 athletes competing and 14 college student helpers. "We have an outstanding SDSU partnership and so many student volunteers," said Gehring. The different sports offered are softball, bowling, basketball, power lifting, track, race walking, soccer, skiing, volleyball, and swim.

"I just love that [this program] brings opportunities for individuals that wouldn't go out on their own," said Gehring.

"If it wasn't for Special Olympics, I wouldn't have learned how to ski," said athlete Kayla, on the way to Terry Peak for the State Special Olympic Skiing Tournament. "Now, I can ski on weekends with my family." In a short amount of time, Kayla has progressed from a Novice skier to an Intermediate at the State Tournament.

Some Special Olympics athletes choose to participate in community sports. "We have a wrestler that is wrestling with his peers," said Gehring.

One of the best ways community members can help the Special Olympics is by getting out there and cheering athletes on. "I am not saying that you have to volunteer, giving money is volunteering, but I encourage everyone to get out there and see what you're giving to is a precious gift."

If you would like to get involved, you can become a volunteer or coach. "My husband who said he would never get involved is now coaching," said Gehring. "My husband said well I wanted to spend time with my wife, so I decided to get involved." Gehring's husband coaches Unified programs which combine students with disabilities and students without.

"What I love about United Way and our community is just how giving they are. And we see that and think about how can our athletes give back," said Gehring. "Some ways we do this is by wiping tables at the Arts festival, greeting people and thanking them. Also, we have some athletes out working full-time jobs in the community."

For more information or to volunteer contact Suzy at 605.692.4593.

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## Brookings Offers A Variety of Transportation Options

Medical visits are important. Getting there shouldn't be a concern.

"We want people to know there are options," said Heidi Gullickson, Executive Director of Brookings Area United Way. "Each of these programs is unique yet provide similar services."

**Brookings Area Transit Authority (BATA):** "The mission of the Brookings Area Transit Authority is to provide coordinated transportation services for all citizens of the Brookings area and foster independence by providing mobility options." BATA provides transportation for all trip types from recreational to employment trips and medical appointments. During BATA's 2015 fiscal year, 11,288 medical trips were made locally as well as out of the area.

A unique aspect of BATA is that they are a Medicaid provider. What this means is that most Medicaid recipients are able to receive medical transportation at no cost to them. For passengers who do not receive Medicaid coverage, rates vary and information can be found at [BrookingsAreaTransit.com](http://BrookingsAreaTransit.com). They accept tokens, cash, checks, and credit cards. BATA also offers shuttle transportation daily to Sioux Falls for \$20 round-trip to keep medical transportation affordable to our passengers.

"We strive to provide comfortable, safe, and reliable transportation to all of our passengers for any trip type. We are proud to offer accessible transportation to passengers who have mobility challenges," says Brenda Schweitzer, Executive Director.

**Volunteers of America (VOA):** Volunteers of America, Dakotas is a non-profit spiritually based organization that reaches out to empower people of all ages to become healthier, self-sufficient, productive members of their communities. VOA work with residents that are over the age of 55. One of the federally reimbursed areas is transportation assistance.

"In keeping with our mission, we are looking forward to working with our community partners like BATA and VSB to provide a wide array of volunteer and support services. One example will be our RSVP volunteers providing transportation assistance for medical appointments out of town," says Robin Erz, Senior Corps Director.

**Volunteer Service Bank (VSB):** The VSB is an organization that connects volunteers with those in need of volunteer help. Our mission is "neighbor helping neighbor to assist elderly, handicapped, youth and underprivileged with volunteer help." Their main focus is the escort and transport program, which provides rides to in-town and out-of-town medical appointments. They have a number of volunteer drivers and look forward to serving the riders. "Our service is unique in that we don't charge our riders and we don't turn anyone away. We do gladly accept donations," says Kyleigh Cramer, Program Director. VSB feels Gandhi said it best: "the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

**For more information or to volunteer, contact these organizations at:**

**BATA: 605.692.5416**

**VOA: 605.592.9010**

**VSB: 605.692.6102**

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## FUN FACTS

Brookings Special Olympics offers a young athletes program for those age 2 to 6



BATA traveled 497,432 miles in FY2015



Tai Chi is just one of many classes offered at the Brookings Activity Center.

