

What's Up, College Station? Transcript

Season 4, Episode 40

Grace Hollowell: Have you noticed any new trends or interest among our longtime participants in our senior programs that have influenced the programming that we offer?

Kari Williamson: Oh, yeah. Our fitness programs have always been huge. Our line dancing and Forever Size, which is one of our seated exercise classes, have always been popular. But lately, there seems to be even more increased popularity for those programs. We fill those rooms up with people that are just there to have a good time and exercise. They don't even know that they're exercising sometimes.

Grace Hollowell: That's the best kind of exercise. Exactly. What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hollowell, and today I'm joined by Keri Williamson, our Senior Services Coordinator from our Parks and Recreation Department. Hi, Keri.

Kari Williamson: Hi, how are you?

Grace Hollowell: I'm doing well. Welcome back to the show.

Kari Williamson: Thanks for having me.

Grace Hollowell: Yeah, it is always exciting to get to highlight our senior programs that we have here at the city because we have so many of them, and there are so many vastly different opportunities for our adults ages 55 plus to get involved. But to kick things off today, tell us a little bit about who you are and what you do.

Kari Williamson: My name is Keri. I am the Senior Services Coordinator for the College Station Parks and Recreation Department. I've been in this role for four years now, and I oversee all of our programming that we offer for those 55 and over at all three of our community centers. Every month we put together a calendar full of activities. We put on special events and I get to be a part of all of those in the planning process.

Grace Hollowell: And what is your favorite part about your job?

Kari Williamson: Goodness, there's a lot of things that I enjoy about this job. Not only knowing that we're providing a space and time for our seniors to come in and have a good time—it's a lot of hard work and planning involved in that, but at the same time, I get to join in on the fun too. If you know me at all, you can find me on the dance floor at our special events, participating in certain activities, playing games. I enjoy being a part of that fun too.

Grace Hollowell: Awesome. And how does what you do impact our community?

Kari Williamson: I think it's a great way to benefit you in so many different ways: physically, mentally, emotionally, getting together and socializing with others. There's so many benefits that our programs come along with. If you are looking for something new to try, I think that we really do have something for everyone. It's just a great place to come and get involved in something, make new friends, and create new memories.

Grace Hallowell: Yeah, absolutely. So what changes for you in the programming for the seniors during this fall season?

Kari Williamson: Whereas a lot of our parks and rec are very busy in the summers, I would say that October through December is very busy for me. Each month we have something to look forward to, something to celebrate, a special event. It is a busy time. October, we get to have a free special event, and same with November and December. So a lot of different opportunities to come together and see what our program is all about.

Grace Hallowell: And for our viewers who may be new to our senior adult programs, what sorts of activities do we offer?

Kari Williamson: We offer a wide variety of programs. We have many different exercise classes from line dancing to seated exercise classes, yoga, Tai Chi, some meditation classes. Then we also have a lot of different games that you can play and a lot of groups that get together and play all sorts of games. We also have some opportunities to learn more about your technology, your phones, and your computers. Then we also bring in people to do presentations on health and wellness, Medicare, and all those different topics that revolve around our seniors and stuff to keep in the know about as you age and get older.

Grace Hallowell: Yeah, absolutely. The social aspect, too, is something that is very important. I know I was raised by my grandparents, and they were always busy bees going and doing something. But I know they had friends who it was a little tougher to break out of their shell and meet new people. It's easy to stay in your comfort zone, especially when the weather is getting cooler and you might not want to go outside. So what would you say to someone who might be looking for something to do, but they don't know where to start or where to look?

Kari Williamson: I would say just showing up at one of our centers is always the great first step, or going online to our website and doing some research before you come in. Then when you come in, we have our recreation assistants there at the front to help you answer questions. We're giving you a monthly calendar, we're giving you our parks and recreation guide that has all of our descriptions for everything that you see on the calendar, and we get the opportunity to show you around and introduce you to programs that peak your interest or something that you've never done before. Just showing up is always that great first step. I'm sure that we could find something that you would enjoy, and we always look forward to helping people find a program that they get to be a part of for years.

Grace Hollowell: Of course. And have you noticed any new trends or interest among our longtime participants in our senior programs that have influenced the programming that we offer?

Kari Williamson: Oh, yeah. Our fitness programs have always been huge. Our line dancing and forever size, which is one of our seated exercise classes, those have always been popular. But lately, there seems to be even more increased popularity for those programs, and we fill those rooms up with people that are just there to have a good time and exercise. They don't even know that they're exercising sometimes.

Grace Hollowell: That's the best kind of exercise. Exactly.

Kari Williamson: Watching those programs grow and seeing that increased interest has been great. Some of our games, you might have heard of Mahjong.

Grace Hollowell: I have, yes.

Kari Williamson: People are really enjoying that. Also our Tai Chi program. People have really been interested in our Tai Chi program, so much so that we have an intermediate class now because people have been doing it for so long. So a lot of different programs that people have been interested in over the past couple of years, and programs that I've gotten to see grow and change so much.

Grace Hollowell: Now, for these programs, a lot of them require a senior pass. What does it provide access to, and who is eligible for a senior pass?

Kari Williamson: When you get our senior calendar, anything that's printed in black is included in your senior membership. If you're a resident of College Station, it's \$27 for an entire year.

Grace Hollowell: It's a great deal.

Kari Williamson: It is. And when you live outside of College Station, it's \$34 for an entire year. Then you'll see our color legend on the calendar where anything in green is free for those 55 and over. I always encourage people to come to our free events first, see how it is, maybe meet some new people before getting involved in our senior membership. It's always a great place to start.

Grace Hollowell: Now, one of the special events coming up is the Senior Autumn Fest. What can attendees expect from this year's event?

Kari Williamson: Our Parks and Recreation staff get together, come up with a theme, and dress up. Last year, we got to be Toy Story.

Grace Hollowell: Awesome.

Kari Williamson: This year, we're going to be superheroes. So it's always fun for us, too. When you come in with your costume, get your door prize ticket, we'll have a DJ with music. We have our wonderful recreation manager, Louie, on the grill making burgers, and we have staff putting together to-go boxes with burgers, chips, and cookies. Not only are you getting a good meal, but we'll have games that people can play. We do a cake walk, which is always a popular one at this event. You're definitely going to go home with some sort of sweet treat, and that's always something that people look forward to. We do a lot of dancing, so wear your dancing shoes and come have some fun with us.

Grace Hollowell: Awesome. Yeah, I know not too long ago we had Patrick, who is involved in Southwood, talk about the Haunted Hike event. I know he is very into the Halloween spirit, so I'm excited to see his costume as well as the rest of y'all's.

Kari Williamson: We have fun with our costumes.

Grace Hollowell: So how does an event like this help bring seniors together and build those connections within our community?

Kari Williamson: Like I touched on earlier, it's a great first thing for people to do when you are interested in getting involved and doing something new. Coming to our free special events, you get to come in to a great atmosphere where not only are the seniors having fun, the staff are having a good time, which makes a huge difference. It's just a great way to get together, have a good meal, play games, and really see what our program's all about. It makes you want to come back and see what else we're offering throughout the week.

Grace Hollowell: Yeah, absolutely. And what are you personally looking forward to most about this year's event?

Kari Williamson: Probably seeing everybody in their costumes. And I'm always looking forward to Louie's burgers.

Grace Hollowell: Very good. Now, how do you reach seniors who may not know about these programs or events?

Kari Williamson: I'm very out and about in our community. There's so many different small groups through churches or groups that get together once a month and bring in guest speakers. I'm always happy to come out, bring calendars, bring our parks guide in, and show them everything that we're doing. I have a PowerPoint with pictures and videos so people can really see what's going on. We also bring in our seniors with that community engagement as well, giving them posters and handouts, and they take them out to their doctor's offices, gyms that they're part of, and different outside groups. There's just something about somebody who's a part of the program, has witnessed the benefits that

everybody's getting out of it, and shares that word of mouth to people that might not know about our programs. Not only do I get to educate, but our seniors get to go out and about and share all the fun things we're doing as well.

Grace Hollowell: What has working with College Station's senior community taught you? I'm sure this is a very rewarding job.

Kari Williamson: It is very rewarding. It has taught me the importance of community and having that village of people around you to support you, celebrate you, and lift you up when you're down. Not only has this job done that for me, but getting to see that amongst our seniors and how they show up for each other in our programs has taught me how important it is to have a great group of people around you because you don't know what people are going through, especially when they're walking in that door for the first time. Watching people that have come in when I first started and seeing where they're at now and all the friends that they've made—that's really special, and it's taught me a lot about community.

Grace Hollowell: And is there a particular program or event that has stuck with you throughout the years during your time here?

Kari Williamson: Oh, goodness. There's so many. Recently, we have something called a Bunco party. Bunco is a very social dice game—super easy, doesn't really require a lot of thought. We've played around with it over the years to figure out what works, and we just started making monthly parties out of it.

Grace Hollowell: Awesome.

Kari Williamson: Not only do I get to be a part of it, but we have some of our senior members that have been coming around for a while host, getting them involved in the planning process and taking ownership of it. Everybody brings food and they have a theme each month for their Bunco party. It's just fun to see everybody coming together and contributing to an event. That's something that started out pretty small, and I've gotten to watch that grow into almost 50 people every single month. So that one's a lot of fun.

Grace Hollowell: Yeah, it sounds like a lot of fun. Now, what is one thing that you wish more people in our community knew about our senior programs?

Kari Williamson: I think how much that we offer. When you're looking at our calendar and our guide and reading through it, we offer so much. I grew up in the area close to my grandparents, and I started working with seniors at a very young age, and I had no idea what the City of College Station was offering. Getting to be a part of that now—planning, organizing, and educating people on our program—it really is great to see how much we're offering for those 55 and over.

Grace Hollowell: Yeah, absolutely. Now, where can people find out more about our senior programs?

Kari Williamson: Online is a great place to start: cstx.gov/seniors. Our monthly calendar gets posted on there every month, and our guide has the senior section ready for you to pull up and look at. It's a great place to look for descriptions for everything.

Grace Hollowell: Perfect. Now, before we go, we have a quick little lightning round of fall-themed questions. Are you ready?

Kari Williamson: I'm ready.

Grace Hollowell: Okay. Pumpkin spice or apple cider?

Kari Williamson: I am a pumpkin spice girl. I'm going for the pumpkin at the end of August at Starbucks and everything. So very much pumpkin.

Grace Hollowell: Okay. Haunted house or scary movie?

Kari Williamson: That's tough. I'm going to say scary movie.

Grace Hollowell: Okay. What is the first sign that it finally feels like fall in College Station?

Kari Williamson: Probably when I'm not sweating at 10 o'clock in the morning. Very true. And then later on in the year when the leaves start to change. That's always nice to see. It's not as pretty as other places, but we do get to see that a little bit.

Grace Hollowell: Yes, we do. What is one fall activity that you think everyone should try at least once?

Kari Williamson: Probably going to a pumpkin patch. You're going to find me at a pumpkin patch every fall with my little one, and it's always that staple activity that I'm going to be doing in the fall.

Grace Hollowell: Yes, great fall tradition. And then finally, describe College Station senior programming in three words.

Kari Williamson: I would say inclusive, joyful, and supportive.

Grace Hollowell: Awesome. Well, thank you so much for joining me today, Keri.

Kari Williamson: Thanks for having me.

Grace Hollowell: And that's what's up.