

Maple Leaf Quest:

How Kerby Centre used Active Aging Week[®] to bookend a yearlong walking initiative



In an Active Aging Week best practice, this Canadian agency intertwined the 2016 and 2017 aging festivals with celebrations for a national milestone, motivating participation—and 43 million steps—over a 12-month period

Every year local hosts develop customized schedules of Active Aging Week[®] activities that show remarkable creativity and produce positive life experiences. One hope expressed for the annual celebration of aging and living well is that older adults will try something that engages them meaningfully and encourages them ultimately to adopt a

wellness practice or lifestyle. For hosts, the challenge can lie in translating interest in demonstrations and free activities into ongoing participation. One agency in Calgary, Canada, found an answer to this challenge in a wellness initiative bookended by consecutive Active Aging Weeks.

Dedicated to enhancing the lives of people ages 55+, Kerby Centre seeks to help older adults in the province of Alberta “live as well as possible, for as long as possible, as residents in the community.” The not-for-profit organization, founded in 1973, served more than 25,000 “unique individuals” in 2017.¹ Among

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Participants took to the trails of Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada, for a walk to celebrate Active Aging Week 2017 and the end of Kerby Centre's Maple Leaf Quest



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On September 26, 2017, Kerby Centre in Calgary, Canada, transported a busload of participants in its Maple Leaf Quest to Banff National Park for a celebratory walk and picnic. The Active Aging Week event marked the Quest's successful end

other things, the agency provides information, services and programming for older adults, with active living, fitness and lifelong-education among its offerings. For some years, its programming has included Active Aging Week events and activities.

Mark your calendar

Observance: Active Aging Week® 2018

Theme: Inspiring wellness

Dates: September 23–29, 2018

Connect with Active Aging Week:
<http://www.activeagingweek.com>,
<https://www.facebook.com/ActiveAgingWeek>, #activeagingweek

Active Aging Week 2018 is sponsored by Abbott Nutrition, Aegis Therapies/EnerG® by Aegis, Domtar and SwimEx.

In 2016, Kerby Centre staff leveraged the annual active-aging celebration to launch a yearlong wellness initiative in which participants tracked their steps for a virtual cross-country walk. The Maple Leaf Quest invited adults ages 55+ to walk across Canada “from coast to coast to coast” to celebrate the nation’s 150th birthday (July 1, 2017). That’s no small feat in a country whose total area (9.98 million sq. km./3.85 million sq. mi.) ranks second largest in the world.²

Kerby Centre kicked off the Quest on September 27, 2016, with a walk event in Confederation Park, a Calgary green space “created to celebrate Canada’s Centennial in 1967.”³ The initiative ended during Active Aging Week 2017, with a celebratory walk and picnic on September 26 in Banff, the country’s oldest national park.⁴

“The goal was to walk across every province and territory throughout the year

(one per month) and eventually make our way across Canada,” says Kerby Centre’s Chad Geiger, senior manager, facilities. “We thought it was an excellent opportunity to intertwine Active Aging Weeks and Canada’s birthday celebrations.”

Implementing the initiative

Taking the Quest lead at Kerby Centre were Manager of Education and Recreation Kari Stone and Director of Operations Lynn Podgurny. Every month center staff mapped the course for participants to “virtually traverse” a new province or territory, with maps posted in the Education and Recreation Department and posters displayed to show how far people had walked.

Quest participants received free pedometers. Individuals were each responsible for tracking and reporting their progress, which they could do by entering steps online in a simple process. If they were uncertain about the technology,

they could record their steps on paper for staff to enter at the center. Walking and fitness tips were also provided.

To keep people engaged and motivated, Kerby Centre offered a guided community group walk each month, Geiger continues. Individuals could complete one walk or as many as they desired. Participation needed to be flexible, he explains, because a lot of older Calgarians spend the winter months in warmer climates.

The “monthly meetups,” though independently organized, fit into the Kerby Centre’s “Canada 150” programming for the year, and showcased interesting locations in and around the Calgary area. Some walks involved bus trips to a destination (e.g., the Olympic Oval Walk on Valentine’s Day 2017), others left from the building. There was also an overnight expedition on the Trans Canada Trail. “Highlights of these walks,” Geiger says, “included parks, nature reserves, malls, the overhead walkway connections through downtown, and even around the concourse of the Saddledome during a Calgary Flames’ practice.” [Ed. The 19,000-seat Scotiabank Saddledome is an indoor arena that is home ice to the city’s National Hockey League team.⁵]


Expenses for the Quest included pedometers, food and snacks, newspaper advertising and buses. Also, “Canada 150” pins were purchased to distribute at the 2016 launch. As with Active Aging Week events, participation in the yearlong initiative was free to everyone, except for small fees payable for bus trips. Kerby Centre contributed CAD\$2,000 toward costs, according to Geiger. Corporate sponsorship covered the remainder.

Impact and outcomes

Kerby Centre staff consider the Maple Leaf Quest to have succeeded admirably at engaging participants to be active and motivating them to stay involved. Intro-

duced during Active Aging Week, the Quest celebrated Canada’s 150th birthday through exercise, observes Keith Callbeck, senior manager of marketing and communications. Community walks took place each month for a year, and more than “300 older adults received a pedometer to track their steps,” Callbeck says. “We clocked over 43 million steps as part of our Quest. That’s all the way across Canada and back. To mark the finale of this amazing journey,” he adds, “Kerby Centre brought 45 older adults to Banff National Park to walk, take photos, enjoy each other’s company, and celebrate our great country.”

In Chad Geiger’s view, the Quest “attracted a wide variety of people each month because it was based on people’s interests. It had a far reach because there was something for everybody,” he says.

Kerby Centre’s learnings have included the importance of providing opportunities outside the building, Geiger shares, while the unexpected popularity of the Quest’s overnight trip has encouraged staff to plan other such opportunities. Hosted by Kerby instructor Bonnie Field, a seven-day yoga-centered cruise from Vancouver to Alaska is scheduled for the last week of September. It promises to be a fun, active Kerby Centre adventure for this year’s Active Aging Week. 

The Journal on Active Aging[®] thanks Chad Geiger and Keith Callbeck for their help with this article. For more about Kerby Centre, visit <https://www.kerbycentre.com>.

References

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4. Parks Canada. (n.d.). Banff National Park. Retrieved on June 14, 2018, from <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/ab/Banff>.
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Images courtesy of Kerby Centre

Snapshot of Maple Leaf Quest: An Active Aging Week best practice

Kicked off with launch event for Active Aging Week 2016.

Engaged 312 individuals over 12 months.

Offered monthly community group walk to motivate participants.

Programmed walks to interesting locations.

Allowed (mostly) free and flexible participation in program.

Provided free pedometers to participants to track steps.

Enabled online reporting of steps and record of progress.

Extended reach with “something for everybody.”

Held celebratory event to end initiative during Active Aging Week 2017.

Resulted in 43 million steps logged in one year.