

Sports



Active for Life

St. Tammany Senior Olympians are on the move and primed for the district games

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Cy and Millie Buchert signed up for their first Senior Olympics in 1984, the year the games got their start in Louisiana.

Twenty-four years later, the Covington couple is still competing — and winning.

The Bucherts have made it to the national games each year, so many times now they've lost count and often turn down chances to go.

"In our age group now, since we're coming into the 85 to 90 group, you just don't have the competition" that once existed, says Cy Buchert, 86.

This year, the pair is competing in the St. Tammany district games, which began March 27 at the Folsom Senior Center and run through May 17 at the Mandeville Senior



PHOTO COURTESY OF LOUISIANA SENIOR OLYMPIC GAMES

Seniors from all over the region compete in the St. Tammany district games to qualify for the Louisiana Senior Olympic Games held in Baton Rouge every fall. Here the men participate in the archery competition in the 2007 state games.

Center. The district games serve as a qualifier for the state competitions held in the fall.

The Bucherts plan to participate in as many events as they can fit into their schedule.

"We'll do table tennis — that's my wife's specialty," Cy Buchert said in February. "We'll do track and field. She does the shot put, the discus and the javelin. And she does the throws: softball, football and Frisbee."

Cy also planned to compete in the 1,500-meter race-walk, an event in which he's ranked nationally the past several years.

"It's all about having a good time," says Edward McCraney, who helped start the St. Tammany district games in 2002. Today, he helps coordinate the games locally through the parish's Council on Aging. At 71, McCraney is also a participant.

The district games attracted 293 participants last year, according to Louisiana Senior Olympic Games, the nonprofit that plans and promotes the 10 district games held statewide, and the annual State Championship Games. The Southeast district, which includes Baton Rouge, attracted the most participants, with 1,200 in 2007.

McCraney says people come from as far away as North Carolina, Texas and Alabama to take part in the St. Tammany district games.

"Basically, the Senior Olympics is to help those 50 and older improve their quality of life through sports and other activities," McCraney says. "Our main purpose is to get them out there and enjoying themselves."

For those disinclined to participate in the athletic competitions, McCraney says the games offer activities to suit everyone. There are arts and crafts, baking and Texas hold 'em competitions.

"This is not just for the energetic seniors," he says.

"The appeal is getting out, meeting people," says Buchert, a World War II veteran who once worked for the Treasury Department. "It's just so pleasant!"

But beyond the camaraderie inherent to the games, McCraney and others testify to the physical benefits of taking part in the games.

"I found out it's good for arthritis," says McCraney, a Mandeville resident who after 25 years of inactivity picked up basketball about



PHOTO BY PAUL BERTHE

Cy and Millie Buchert, both 86, of Covington have been participating in the Senior Olympics since 1984. They say the benefits go far beyond athletics. It's also about getting out and meeting people.

11 years ago and is now a regular participant in the basketball competition.

McCraney says the games have helped inspire people who long ago put away their athletic shoes to get — and stay — active.

The Bucherts, regulars at the local YMCA who can be spotted gardening and walking around their neighborhood at every possible chance, are examples of the benefits of exercise.

"We're fortunate," Cy Buchert says. "My wife and I have been blessed. This woman I'm married to for 64 years, she's not stopping."

Buchert, active since his days of running track in high school, in recent years has started noticing he's in much better shape than many people

decades his junior.

"We run into a lot of people that are having diabetes, and they're having this and they're having that." He says they often ask for his and his wife's secret.

"Just move," he says. "I'm a stickler for that." •