

# Senior Wednesday promotes lifelong learning

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Based on the 2021 U.S. Census, approximately 20% of Wichita's population consists of individuals over the age of 60, totaling nearly 128,000 people. If you belong to this group, there are some great opportunities for you in the city.

One such program is Senior Wednesday, an initiative organized by [museums across Wichita](#) specifically for people aged 55 and older.

Education Specialist Joe McDowell said that Senior Wednesday was started over a decade ago by the non-profits in Wichita to foster community engagement and provide enriching learning activities for older residents.

The Sedgwick County Zoo hosts Senior Wednesday the second Wednesday of every month at 10 a.m.

When arriving, guests will enter the Cargill Learning Center and make their way to the auditorium. On the way, they can stop and grab a snack, like a muffin, or drinks such as orange juice and coffee.

"We have the [Beastro](#) provide pastries, or sundries and coffee, sometimes orange juice," McDowell said. "It creates a more comfortable atmosphere, to just come listen to someone speak."



Upon entering the auditorium, the first thing you'll notice is the energy in the room. Everyone is excited to be here.

Some Senior Wednesday locations charge a program fee, and the Zoo used to charge \$4 per person for the event. But the Zoo's Senior Wednesday sessions are free to attend through the end of 2023.

In the past, the Zoo has asked regular attendees if they're interested in helping sponsor the event. They can "pay it forward" so that people can attend who wouldn't come if there was a fee attached. And Senior Wednesday is important enough to people that the Zoo has sponsors.

"It's a free program right now because we have a sponsor," McDowell said. "It's an anonymous sponsor, and they provide the entire year's worth of funds."

Senior Wednesday always starts with what's new at the Zoo. Curator of Education and Farms Schanee Anderson gives an update on the latest happenings at the Zoo, including animal birthdays, health updates, upcoming events, and job listings. Joe McDowell then takes the stage for that week's presentation.

"I'll do a presentation that is a designated topic," McDowell said. "It changes every single month."

In addition to including photos and videos in the presentation, McDowell also includes stories about the topic, either stories he found when researching or personal anecdotes from his time as a zookeeper. When possible, he also includes tactile elements, such as bones and hides.

Every Senior Wednesday has a different theme. They range from conversations on specific animals at SCZ to horticulture or medical care and husbandry. The themes of each session are thoughtfully selected to align with topical events and occasions like Shark and Ray Awareness Week or World Camel Day.



"I try to do an animal or some sort of topic that's environment or animal conservation related to some degree," McDowell said. "Sometimes I'll just think of something I want to learn about and that's what I'll choose."

The atmosphere during Senior Wednesday is lively and joyful. Attendees laugh, share stories, ask questions, and actively participate in the learning process. And this desire to learn is perhaps best reflected in the fact that many guests are returning attendees.

"I think it's good community building," McDowell said. "We've had a lot of people that are fairly new that have become regulars, and people that have been coming for years."

The positive impact of Senior Wednesday is not just limited to knowledge enhancement but also extends to overall well-being. [Studies by AARP](#) have shown that participating in senior-centered programs can lead to a delay in the onset of chronic diseases and improved mental, social, and emotional health.

The Sedgwick County Zoo is dedicated to promoting lifelong learning for people of all ages, ensuring that each visit leaves visitors with new knowledge and memorable experiences. Whether you're eight or 80 years old, there are plenty of opportunities to expand your horizons and engage with the community through enriching programs like [Senior Wednesday](#).