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Walkers get workout in halls of SouthPark mall

JANET HAAS

Many Charlotteans go to SouthPark mall not to shop, but to walk. This week I took a few laps with two mall walkers who say safety, camaraderie and free coffee make SouthPark a favorite place to exercise.

Mary Counts

I couldn't miss Mary Counts walking inside SouthPark mall. This active senior wore a bright pink Carolina shirt, emblazoned with the telling pink ribbon. Counts agreed to talk while we walked. In 2001, when her husband Robert was dying from lung cancer, Counts began walking outside. "I needed to walk because of the stress," she said. "But when I fell, Robert didn't want me walking outside anymore."

A friend invited Counts to SouthPark, and she's been walking the mall ever since. "I could walk and be home before he ever got up, and it was so convenient."

Since her husband's death in 2001, Counts has kept up her pace. This active retiree spends Monday mornings after her walk meeting with friends in the food court, where she takes advantage of the free coffee donated by Chick-fil-A from 9 to 10:30 a.m.

"I feel blessed to have this place to walk, said Counts. "I feel safe and secure."

Doris Shaughnessy

When Doris Shaughnessy moved to Charlotte in 1970, she remembers getting a morning and an evening paper. "But I'm really not that old," she said. Celebrating her 80th birthday this year, Shaughnessy has been walking SouthPark mall for 20 years, since she retired as a medical technician from Mecklenburg Medical Group. Her husband of 14 years, Robert, used to join her but now has difficulty walking.

Shaughnessy mall walks six days a week, for a total of 12 miles. She also attends water aerobics classes at the YWCA on Park Road three days a week. Shaughnessy said, "If you don't use it, you lose it."

This mother of two likes to spend her summers eating lobster in New Hampshire and taking occasional trips to Kansas City to visit her granddaughters. "We're a good family; we keep our distance, so we stay happy," she said.

About walking

Want to know more about mall walking at SouthPark?The perimeter of SouthPark, including the food court, measures 1.5 miles.

The mall opens its Center Court entrance by the escalators at 7 a.m. seven days a week. The other entrances open at 8 a.m.

Sponsored by Carolinas Medical Center and Charlotte Radiology, the mall walkers program meets at 8:30 a.m. on the first Tuesday of the month in the food court. A light breakfast is served, courtesy of Becky Herring of Allen Tate Realtors.

Favorite places of the past

I appreciate your e-mails this past week. Thanks for telling me what you like about SouthPark and Cotswold and keeping me informed about neighborhood events. To those eagle eyes with memories better than mine, thanks for catching my brain blip: Park Road Shopping Center, not SouthPark mall, was the former home of J.C. Penney.

Now, let's jog your memory. What are some of your favorite haunts from Charlotte past? You have stories; I want to hear them. Keep those e-mails coming!

Janet Haas

Janet Cooper Haas lives in the SouthPark area and writes about neighborhoods in the SouthPark and Cotswold areas. Have an item for her? Write: jhaas@charlotteobserver.com.



Mary Counts



Doris Shaughnessy