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The Secret of Youth Through Movement

By Sophie Braccini



Fitness class at the Lafayette Community Center Photo Sophie Braccini

"The more active a person is, the better they will weather aging." This statement is Anne Randolph's professional mantra. A physical therapist with 38 years of experience specializing in geriatric physical therapy, Randolph sees every day what a difference regular physical activity makes in a senior's recovery - and how local seniors are taking charge of their health through movement. "It does not matter what you do, as long do it regularly," she says. "People can garden or walk or exercise: this is the secret of youth."

For Margaret Goglia, 64, Lucille Zammitti, 79, and Herb Wehmeyer, 85, an active and healthy lifestyle involves taking classes taught by Stuart Moore, the 24 Hour Fitness trainer and instructor who took over the senior fitness class a year ago. Since he came on board, numbers have exploded. "At some point we had 50 people in the class," says the super-fit trainer in his late 60s. "Something had

to be done." The club added three more classes and the numbers of participating seniors continues to grow.

Fitness classes for seniors throughout Lamorinda are multiplying and diversifying. In addition to 24 Hour Fitness classes in Moraga, the Oakwood Athletic Club in Lafayette and the Lafayette Community Center offer senior classes, as well as Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church in Orinda.

Moore's class participants highlight the rigor and diversity of exercises that address the whole body from head to toe, including all muscle groups and joints. "Stuart is a real asset to the community," says Wehmeyer. "I like his business-like approach."

"He covers everything seamlessly without any strange music," adds Goglia.

Sue Funkhouser is another local senior fitness star. She is an independent trainer teaching classes at the Lafayette Community Center, at Merrill Gardens, Oakwood Athletic Club and Holy Shepherd. "She is fabulous, she keeps us laughing all the time," says 74-year-old Linda FitzGerald, who has been coming to Funkhouser's class at the community center for nearly four years. Ann Procella, in the same age group and fitness class, says that the arthritis in her hands is now gone, while Lisa Mac emphasizes that the core exercises have increased her confidence and the balancing exercises have helped her avoid falling a couple of times.

The American Academy of Family Physicians states that regular exercise provides a myriad of health benefits in older adults, including improvements in blood pressure, diabetes, lipid profile, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, and neurocognitive function.

Not only do participants talk about the positive impact the classes have, they also talk about the social element. "When I'm gone and can't make the class, I really miss it," says FitzGerald.

"We care about each other," adds Zammitti.

While each class broadly addresses issues of balance, strength and flexibility, each has its specificity. Moore's class emphasizes neck strength and flexibility, ankle flexibility, as well as mobility. Funkhouser's class incorporates music and low-impact aerobics. At Oakwood, water aerobics and small group TRX classes for seniors is offered, as well as a chair yoga class. "Water aerobics is great for strength, and some people may need to avoid weight-bearing exercise, but if you want to fight osteoporosis you need weight-bearing," says Oakwood instructor Maura Sheridan. She teaches a fee-based class for a small number of seniors (six maximum), who pursue specific

strength, agility and balance goals at the Lafayette club. She is also a TRX expert and says that the device, which leverages gravity and bodyweight to perform exercises, can be used very successfully for seniors. "I have a 90-plus-year-old client training with TRX. She is such a role model," says the 45-year-old instructor.

The majority of participants in senior classes are women, but at 24 Hour Fitness and Oakwood about 20 percent of the class's regular participants are men.

While there is a wide range of classes offered in Lamorinda, Randolph would like to see more chair exercise classes. "This can be extremely useful for some people," she says. The physical therapist makes presentations once a month at the Lafayette Community Center about topics such as Therabands or osteoporosis. She also goes to people's homes when they need her services.

The Moraga 24 Hour Fitness at 351 Rheem Blvd. is the only Silver Sneaker site in Lamorinda where seniors 65 and older can have their membership paid by their medical insurance. To check for participating insurance companies, visit www.silversneakers.com/tools/eligibility. Funkhouser's Lafayette Recreation classes can be booked online at <http://www.ci.lafayette.ca.us/residents/parks-trails-recreation/recreation-programs>. Randolph can be reached at (925) 254-3300 or online at <http://www.randolphpt.com/>.

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