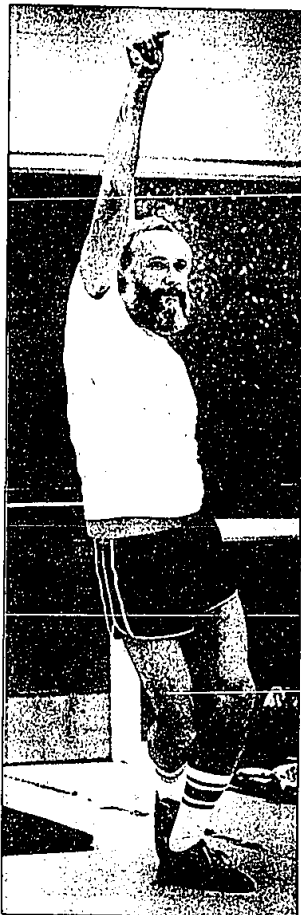




Bulch Bertram, a millwright at GMAD Orion, joined the class with his wife Becky, who is a secretary in the county treasurer's office.



Sandy Knollenberg, a Birmingham resident who started the fitness sessions, leads the group in some spirited movement.

STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

OAKLAND COUNTY employees are a "variety pack" from all walks of life.

But after work, they're a chorus line. Coming from the jail, prosecutor's office, executive building and other county departments, they don't need to sweat pants or shorts and gather in the Mental Retardation Center for aerobic dance.

Bend, stretch. Bend, stretch. Stay, stay down," urges Marion Goode during one of four 5:15-6:15 p.m. workouts in the county complex.

"Get those arms up. Now drop 'em."

STARTED TWO YEARS ago in the Executive Office Building corridors, the aerobic-dance classes offer county employees the opportunity to unwind after a long day.

For many, the strenuous workouts are also rare chances for conditioning — especially for those who have desk jobs. "It's good for the employees, who like it and need it," said Sandy Knollenberg, a Birmingham resident who started the Monday and Wednesday sessions.

"But it's also good for employers. Physical fitness really reduces health problems." Kathy Spence, who began the Tuesday- and Thursday-night classes a year ago, believes the sessions are very important to pressured workers.

"It's a very good anti-stress thing to do," said the Clarkston founder of Swing Fit.

KNOLLENBERG, WHO initiated the exercise program, began teaching aerobic dance about five years ago.

Building on modern jazz background, her offerings grew each year so that now three teachers work with her.

The wife of former Oakland County Republican Party Chairman Joe Knollenberg decided there was a need for a fitness program for county employees. After it outgrew the executive's office, the aerobic-dance class moved into the gym in the Mental Retardation Center.

Although the sessions have no name or gimmicks like T-shirts for class members, there are 40 regular attendees. Both men and women attend the hour-long sessions taught by Farmington resident Goode and Kathy Carter of Lathrup Village.

Some also attend the twice-weekly Swing Fit classes, which attract 12-18 a session.

"THERE'S SO much interest, we keep going year round," said Spence, who walks her group to the county Wave Pool on hot summer days.

"It's a fun way to exercise. People really think they're dancing," said Knollenberg, who at 5 feet 2 inches weighs just 104 pounds. The 44-year-old mother of sons 20 and 17 also teaches in Beverly and Midvale schools in Birmingham and St. Bede Catholic School in Southfield.

Her routines include the Andover High School football

team and Lahser High School football, soccer and girls' soccer teams.

"Athletic training is great, but it tends to make muscles hard and firm," explained Knollenberg, who said the aerobic workouts have cut down on season injuries.

"With aerobics, you get a range of motion and flexibility you don't get otherwise."

CALLING THE COUNTY class a "variety pack of ages and ability," Knollenberg said the teachers' challenge is appealing to all different fitness levels.

She choreographs dances and tapes numbers — which range from Rudy Vallee's "Vagabond Lover" to recent releases like the "Curly Shuffle."

An important element is monitoring dancer's heart rates. "Find your pulse — quick," said Knollenberg, following a workout.

"Anyone outrageous? Don't use your arms as much."

Butch Bertram joined the class with his wife Becky, who is a secretary in the county treasurer's office. And he'd recommend it to anyone.

"It was something for us to do together," explained the millwright at GMAD Orion.

"And it's fun. It's something I always wanted to do."



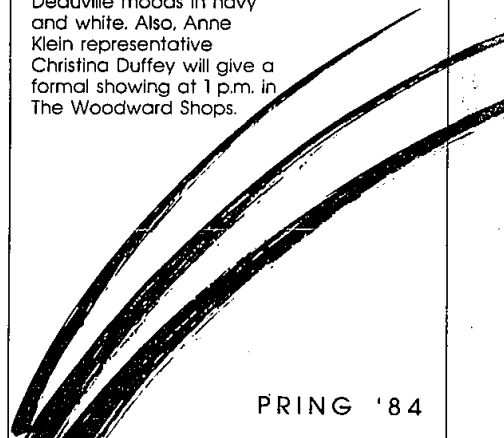
Marge England-Kukuk shows exercising requires concentration.

Aerobic dance fits into these workers' lives

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