

Suburban Life

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Nancy Sebring, a bundle of energy, fires up her workout participants urging them to jog faster in place.

Aerobics lifts heart rates, spirits

By Shirlee Rose Iden
staff writer

Blond, tousle-haired David McKinney is wheeled into the Occupational Therapy Room at the Southfield Rehabilitation Center by his mom, Sue.

Born with spina bifida, the 8-year-old youngster, though "physically challenged" plays basketball, bowls, and can stand up and walk on crutches, but just a little. Mostly, he gets around in his wheelchair.

"I always get here early," said Donna Snyder of Farmington Hills, who works at Mount Carmel Hospital in Detroit.

Born with a bone disease, hers is a visible handicap that shows in the irregular angles of her face and in the unmatched length of her limbs.

With some 20 others, David and Donna have braved the threat of yet another snowstorm to take part in an aerobics workout tailor-made for people with handicaps.

ONE BY ONE, the clients enter, some walking, some gliding in on wheelchairs, one leaning on a cane, another braced by a walker.

Snyder seats herself, and tugs off her shoes, both built up to support her and give her mobility and stability.

"I read in the paper that aerobics increases your stamina, and I don't get much exercise in my desk job," she said. "I've been coming since last fall

and my stamina really is better."

Alice Feldman of Southfield puts aside her walker and eases into a chair, helped by her daughter, Rox Suprenant of Berkeley, who brings her mother to the workout each Tuesday at 5:30 p.m.

"Nothing fancy, but it's hard to get exercise," said Loren Deer of Bloomfield Township, a workout participant since May. "I have a bad hip and need hip replacement. I'm waiting now for surgery."

Nancy Sebring, designer of this special workout for physically challenged persons, comes to the front of the class carrying a bright plastic stereo cassette player, her musical accompaniment and energizer.

DRESSED IN purple and black leotard, tights, leg warmers and a bright smile, she turns on the upbeat music, and seats herself on a wheeled stool covered in cracked blue-green plastic.

"She's lost her hair," said Deer out loud, a dry comment about teacher's new haircut.

For 40 vigorous minutes, more than 20 "physically challenged" are physically challenged. "It's not easy," one participant says, sighing.

"Take a deep breath," chants Sebring.

"Swing with your arms."

"Hold stomachs in, nice and tight," she instructs her class, each exerciser

seated in a straight chair.

"Let's get physical — faster, higher, burn those calories!"

"Deep breath, now blow it out."

"Let's do some punches with our arms."

Half an hour after it starts, with arms, legs, necks and torsos exercised to the capability of the participant, comes the cool down. The session is over.

"KINDA TAUGHT myself aerobics," said Sebring, who began her class almost a year ago.

"I used to dance and taught ballet and put together an aerobics workout. I taught an employees class here at Southfield Rehab, and they asked about something for handicapped persons."

Sebring's class, taught as a community service at no charge, has attracted people from a wide area stretching from Plymouth to Rochester, and including residents all over Oakland and Wayne County.

"I'm getting requests to start other classes now," she said.

"Right now I'm producing a video tape of my workout to be nationally marketed. The video will be out in a couple of months and is intended for individuals to use in their homes."

Sebring said her workout is designed so participants can gear it to their own level by going slower or pausing.

Born in Pontiac, she resides in

Waterford where she was raised. An occupational therapist by trade, she always knew what she wanted to do.

"EVEN IN high school, I knew I would be an occupational therapist. I did volunteer work with Easter Seals and other groups," she said.

Following her graduation from Western Michigan University, she did internships in Florida then returned here to work as a therapist at the Southfield center.

Sebring is an occupational therapist who travels. Employed by Medical Core Inc. in Rochester, she goes to patients' homes in Canton, Garden City, Troy, and even Grand Rapids.

"It's a challenge," she said, "and a nice change. I can't carry much equipment with me, so I have to be adaptable."

The weekly Tuesday aerobics workout is also a challenge and a source of satisfaction to Sebring.

"I see people with multiple sclerosis, polio, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, blindness, stroke and more, come in and make it through a 40-minute workout that isn't easy," she said.

Completing the 40 minutes of aerobics, and they all did, participants left with happy faces just like the one on the teacher.

In their diversity, they shared the accomplishment, heart rates up and spirits too.



Twisting her body to the music from Nancy Sebring's cassette, Alice Feldman (left) of Southfield rocks right and left. Joyce Chin of Warren (above) follows the workout from her wheelchair at her own pace.

Staff photos by Dan Dean



Nancy Sebring leads her aerobics class designed for persons who are physically challenged (left). Sue McKinney encourages her son, David, who met the challenge of his first aerobics class.