

Senior-friendly exercise | by Hana Janjigian Heald

Both Kay Whitney and Donna Lang swear by what they call their "Anti-Aging Exercise Program," a fitness class they take in movement and gentle exercise, which integrates Tai Chi with Yoga movements. They agree that they have received many benefits from it, including staying physically active as they age, to socializing.

There are about 10 other enthusiastic Dedham women in the bi-weekly program, which is coordinated by the Dedham Council on Aging. It is held at the Church of the Good Shepherd, in Oakdale Square, on Monday and Thursday mornings, from 9:30 to 10:30.

"The exercises are adapted specifically for seniors, to improve balance and flexibility, to help stave off effects of arthritis, and to prevent falls," said Whitney. "It helps us grow old gracefully.

"We stretch and limber up. When you watch us, it doesn't look like we expend a lot of energy. It's not cardio-vascular exercise. What we do is based on an ancient martial art, a slow-motion discipline of movements that benefits us, body, mind, and spirit."

Whitney said the newest member is 80 years old. "When she first started she could only stay half a class, and now she feels so much better and can do so much more. She hates to miss a class."

Whitney agrees with her.

"The thing is, if I didn't do it, I would notice it. It keeps me feeling healthy. When I had surgery a while ago, they told me I was in really good physical shape and had great muscle tone. They said that helped my recovery."

The class is taught by Ramel Rones, Mind/body expert and world-renowned Tai Chi and Kung Fu instructor. He is a master in the field of eastern health and martial arts.

Rones's resume says he came to Boston in 1983 after completing Israeli military service. He studied Chinese health and martial arts, and won a number of gold medals in martial arts competitions in North America (1991-1993) and China (1994). Then he became a teacher, training students in techniques of internal and external martial arts, translating and modifying the principles of Chi Kung, Tai Chi, Kung Fu, meditation, and yoga into a Mind/Body approach to deal with the challenges of facing the effects of aging and/or diseases, relieving stress, and improving the quality of life for people of all ages.

Rones's achievements have earned him recognition, support, and state and federal grants from elder community centers, institutions and councils, and from children's schools. In collaboration with the Dana Farber Institute in 1998, Rones received a grant to research quality of life and possible strengthening of the immune system in cancer patients through a Mind/Body approach.

Rones teaches one exercise class in Dedham each week, and Donna Lang takes over the second session, guiding and advising. She has taught for over 10 years, and takes private lessons with Rones.

Lang said, "This class has helped me greatly. I've exercised all my life. I've jogged and played tennis, but it got to be too hard on my feet and knees. When I saw a notice about this program I was desperate for some kind of activity to stay fit, so I signed up. Now I do active things with my granddaughter that I could never do before."

She said, "No pain, no gain' is not the watchword for the exercises we do." They learn how to use the body in effortless ways, by stretching to increase range of motion in the joints, to lengthen the spine, and to increase lung capacity. There are some strength-training movements, too, to prevent osteoporosis.

Lang said that exercise, even begun late in life, can stave off disability that sometimes accompanies old age, and she pointed out there are psychological aspects of exercising regularly.

"It makes me feel better mentally to be doing something healthy for myself."

She finds Rones, "a total inspiration."

"He motivates us by bringing his huge wealth of knowledge into everything that he teaches. It's a mind/body/spirit practice. I don't want to put anybody off, because there's nothing spooky about it, but we learn to meditate with the movements. It's just learning to be mindful about your body. It's calming."

Lang is especially appreciative of the Dedham Council on Aging for contracting with Rones to teach the class.

"He is a world-class resource, and to be able to have a teacher of his caliber work with us in our community and share his knowledge for our benefit is amazing to me," she said.

She also is grateful to the Church of the Good Shepherd for the generous offer of allowing them to hold the class there. "They have been very welcoming to us."

The Dedham Times

April 2, 2004

April 2, 2004

The Dedham Times



(Above): The "Anti-Aging Exercise Class" in action a few weeks ago at the Church of the Good Shepherd, where they meet Monday and Thursday mornings. Front row, from left: the teacher, Ramel Rones, and class members Kay Whitney, Dot Hull, and Jackie Frank. Back row, from left: Carolyn McMahon, Dottie Grady, and Bernie Stephenson.

Courtesy photo

Members of the class have enjoyed socializing with each other, too, Lang said.

"A few of us have gone to some college classes at UMass-Boston that are free for seniors, and some go to the annual Flower Show together. We've also had a surprise birthday party for our 80-year-old member."

Whitney and Lang are actively recruiting new members for the group.

"Originally the COA got a grant to pay for Rones to work with us, but that ran out," Whitney said. "We need to add people to share the cost of our instructor." The hope is that eight to ten will join. Class members pay \$5 for the first lesson and \$1 for the second lesson each week.

"That's to get people to come back for the second session," Whitney said. Those interested can find out more about the "Anti-Aging

Exercise Program" by calling Kay Whitney, (781)-326-1696, or Donna Lang, (781)326-0805. The COA's number is (781) 326-1650. They also want to spread the word that men are very welcome.