

A fit body speeds recovery

By KENNETH R. CERINI

Her words leave imprints of inspiration on those with whom she shares her passion. Jacqui Errico is co-founder of Strength for Life, an organization working to help improve the quality of life for individuals diagnosed with cancer by providing safe and effective exercise programs free of charge.

"Studies have shown that if exercise is incorporated into a treatment plan, recovery and quality of life are greatly enhanced," Errico said. "After the medication, the chemotherapy and the emotional tribulations of living with cancer, we're here to provide the strength and support to our participants."

What is a typical class like? We start with a warm-up, and then move forward to strength training and flexibility. We typically work every body part, however all classes are dependent on the participant's level of fitness, type of cancer and surgery, and risk of lymphedema (swelling occurring from lymph nodes being removed). We are cancer-certified exercise specialists, qualifying us to provide these classes safely to participants, and have the support of a medical advisory board.

Is anyone with a cancer diagnosis eligible to participate? Online registration and medical clearance is required prior to participating. Our classes are for adult men and women who have been diagnosed with any form of cancer. Currently we have two ongoing classes in different locations: the Cancer Center at Stony Brook University, and Body and Balance in Hauppauge. Other interested venues have contacted us with the need for our free services. We will host classes anywhere that has ample space and a group interested.

How do you attract participants to the program? Strength for Life speaks at various support groups about the bene-

fits of exercise for cancer patients and survivors, we also participate in health expos and have public service announcements on the radio. Most of our clients do come from word of mouth but with the growing number of cancer patients and survivors on the Long Island, we know that we need to reach more people. Our hope is to have more doctors and treatment centers telling their clients about our services.

In addition to the classes, do you provide any literature or support services? Strength for Life offers retreats geared toward overall well-being focused on how to incorporate different techniques into the treatment/recovery plan. During our wellness retreat weekend, which is free of charge, we provide all meals, overnight accommodation, a full day of guest speakers and classes such as tai chi, yoga, meditation and art therapy. We limited the number to 20 guests to allow for a real personalized experience. In addition, our goal for this year is to produce an exercise video to distribute to participants so they can exercise from home, and to share with those in support groups who cannot attend the classes. With one-third of all cancer stemming from dietary factors and lack of activity, prevention education is an area that we are expanding into by offering seminars to corporations and speaking at health expos.

What's your vision for Strength for Life? Our goal is to offer our services to every cancer patient and survivor regardless of their location. Our five-year plan is to expand into the 50 states and then take it international. We are one of the few nonprofit organizations offering exercise classes and wellness retreats at no cost to cancer patients, so we know there is a need outside of New York. Strength for Life's mission is about helping everyone participate in an exercise program safely, feel comfortable while working out and regain their strength both physically and emotionally.



Jacqui Errico: Diet and lack of exercise cause one-third of all cancers.

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