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Features

Living Stronger

BY SAMANTHA WOOD FOR THE SUN CHRONICLE

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Janice Kennes, a member of the Invensys Foxboro Branch of the Hockomock Area YMCA's wellness staff and a personal trainer, works with Livestrong at the YMCA program participant Ed Gronostalski of North Attleboro during a recent session in Foxboro. (Staff photo by Tom Maguire)

Cancer survivors gain strength and support from Livestrong at the YMCA program

Walking on a treadmill at the Invensys Foxboro Branch of the Hockomock YMCA, Rachel Glickman of Mansfield reflects on her health while living with breast cancer and undergoing chemotherapy treatments.

"When you're sick, you feel like you will never get back at it. This reminds you that you can do it," Glickman said at a recent session of Livestrong at the YMCA. She is part of the 12-week small group program offered free of charge and created specifically for adult cancer survivors whose bodies are out of shape as a result of their diseases and multiple strength-sapping treatments.

Based on a curriculum developed by Stanford University called "Living Strong, Living Well," the YMCA and the Lance Armstrong Foundation joined together to create an environment that emphasizes health rather than disease. The chemotherapy and radiation that cancer patients undergo can make them feel sicker than the disease itself, so helping patients grow stronger can be an integral part of well-being while sick.

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IN MEMORIAM

The class begins with a discussion. From there, participants venture onto the machines at the gym to complete cardio and strength training. The class concludes with a stretching period and cool down.

As just one of 10 YMCA systems in the country chosen to run the program, the three branches of the Hockomock Area YMCA serve as centers of positivity and strength.



Carolyn Anderson of Foxboro works out during the program. (Staff photo by Tom Maguire)

"I'm working on every part of my body," said first-time participant Ed Gronostalski of North Attleboro during the sixth round of the program in June. "It's making it stronger and making me feel better."

Gronostalski, a survivor of Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, said it was hard to get back into a daily workout routine after undergoing chemotherapy - a sentiment shared by many participants in the class.

That sense of understanding and camaraderie is Foxboro resident and cancer survivor Carolyn Anderson's favorite part of the program.

"I'm with people that I have something in common with and it shows people that cancer does not mean death," Anderson said at a recent class. She was diagnosed with HER2 positive breast cancer, an aggressive and fast-growing form of the disease, in July 2009. She started undergoing chemotherapy in October of the same year and finished in March 2010.

Personal trainer Shana McElroy of Cumberland, who is also the director of association wellness, was one of eight directors to attend the initial training in Texas. Under the guidance of the Lance Armstrong Foundation and Y U.S.A., the trainers underwent three days of specialized instruction, learning about empathy and required reactions to certain situations. Each director had to be a certified personal trainer before beginning the program and many were picked for their emotional connections to cancer.

Putting in the extra effort and personal time to help members improve does not bother McElroy in the least, who shared that her connection with the participants pushes her to stay longer or come in earlier when necessary.

"They (the participants) make you a part of their life and you are attached from day one," McElroy said while assisting students at a recent class.



Rachel Glickman of Mansfield walks on a treadmill during the Livestrong at the YMCA program at the Invensys Foxboro Branch of the Hockomock Area YMCA. (Staff photo by Tom Maguire)

For her "it's the little things, like participants who can only walk for three minutes and have improved to 30 minutes at the end of 12 weeks," that make up her favorite part of the job.

Michael Edwards of Walpole is a return program participant. A long-time swimmer, Edwards admitted that laps in the pool "weren't doing it for me anymore," and when he saw a flyer for the LIVESTRONG classes on the bulletin board, he felt it was the perfect solution.

"My number one issue (before the class) was my stamina," he said while pedaling on a stationary bike. "My wife says they've changed me in ways beyond she ever expected. I'm way more connected with life. I used to be more introverted, but because of the classes, I have become way more extroverted."

Know More

The most recent cycle of the LIVESTRONG program began July 18 at the Bernon Family Branch in Franklin. For more information, or to register for a class, contact these program advisors at the following Hockomock YMCA branches:

Ivensys Foxboro Branch: Shannon West, 508-772-1302, shannonw@hockymca.org



Bernon Family Branch: Vicky Marini, 774-235-2742, vickym@hockymca.org

North Attleboro Branch: Crystal Lozano, 508-643-5218, crystall@hockymca.org.

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