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Senior Living: Residents fire up muscles, minds during Healthy Living Month

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By DEBRA KASZUBSKI
Contributing Writer



Seniors take part in a morning stretch segment Sept. 22 at Waltonwood Twelve Oaks in Novi. The exercise class was part of the educational talk, “The Exercise Effect: How and Why Exercise Works.” (Photo courtesy of Waltonwood)

At 89 years old, Leona Schneider is in good health, having only been to the hospital a few times for minor procedures. She moves easily, and has the wit of someone decades younger.

“I am able to do so much more than most people my age,” she said. “I live a lot more freely, and a move a lot better.”

The great-grandmother attributes her good health to the fitness classes she has taken throughout the years, including the three she’s a regular part of now. Schneider, a retired Southfield teacher, enjoys yoga, stretching, and balance classes at Waltonwood Twelve Oaks, where she lives. She estimates she does well over three hours of exercise a week.

“(Exercise) invigorates you,” she said. “You are using muscles and joints and plus it gets you out to do something.”

Chris Grabowski, fitness coordinator at four Waltonwood senior living communities, hosted the Sept. 22 educational talk, “The Exercise Effect: How and Why Exercise Works.”

The 45-minute session gave seniors the science behind exercise and encouraged them to consider adding physical activities to their daily routines. It was a part of Healthy Living Month, celebrated throughout September at Waltonwood Twelve Oaks.

Grabowski said seniors who exercise have increased range of motion, flexibility, and strength. The morning stretch and balance classes at

Waltonwood, for example, improve functional fitness, giving seniors the strength and endurance needed to maintain independence.

“They workout using movement they would use day in and day out, and by keeping those muscles active they are able to get in and out of the car or bathtub,” he said.

A variety of fitness classes and personal training are offered on an ongoing basis to Waltonwood residents; however, those who don’t live at the senior living facility can find a number of community-based exercise classes hosted by senior centers, Grabowski said. He urged beginners to seek the help of a professional before starting a program.

“I would encourage someone who is new to sit in on a class and watch first; see what it’s all about,” Grabowski said. “If it’s something that they like to do, then go for it. You’d be surprised what you are capable of doing.”

After working their bodies, senior residents and the public also had the chance to work their minds during the Sept. 24 Brain Neurobics session. The class is part of an 11-part series created by the Wayne State Institute of Gerontology, and is designed to help seniors keep their minds sharp through a combination of exercises, games and education.

Attendees also learned how small changes in their daily habits can increase neurons in the brain to help prevent memory loss over time. Simple changes like using your non-dominant hand to brush your teeth, doing puzzles, or engaging your senses in a new way will help fire new brain activity.

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