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FITNESS FORUM - Workout Gives Seniors Youthful Enthusiasm

By: Jack Williams

You could see it in her gait, in her posture, in her overall bearing. Catherine Shelton, approaching 80, was not the woman she used to be.

One of the first to notice was a young neighbor.

"You used to walk all stooped over," she told Shelton. "Now that you're the homeowners association president, you walk so fast. You stand so straight."

Shelton, now 81, knew better.

"It's thanks to my personal trainer," she replied. "Not anything in life beyond that."

For 2-1/2 years, Shelton has been on a prescription that has nothing to do with a pharmacy or a medical doctor. It's a strengthening, balancing, flexibility regimen with a title as simple as its objectives: Active Daily Living.

As one of a burgeoning list of octogenarians or thereabouts at Addie's Studio in San Diego, she pays \$75 an hour twice a week for a program tailored for her specific goals and needs. You'll find her balancing on one foot on an air-filled cushion, lifting colorful medicine balls that look more like toys than weights, and undergoing a hands-on stretching routine.

"It seems smarter to do this than putting money into chemicals at a pharmacy," Shelton said. "Now, as I read about terrible medical bills, the training is even cheap at the price. I've always taken as little medication as possible (for lower back and knee pain). Now, I've reduced that to none."

Shelton may have to go some, though, to outdo Ilse Warschawski. At 92, she works out at Addie's five days a week. "When she started, she was barely able to walk, hunched over, with a cane," said Tyler Merrill, co-owner of Addie's.

Minus the cane, Warschawski warms up for her gym workouts these days by taking a lap around the block. Her crowning achievement: a 200-pound leg press. Her goal: to continue her quality of life.

Sam Kaye, 85, has a similar objective. "When my wife died in 1992, I moped," he said. "When you don't do anything, you get tired. The less you do, the less you want to do. I decided to get off my rear."

Once a week, he drives from a seniors residence to Addie's for upper- and lower-body conditioning. "I'm better than most my age," he said. "Where I live, you could make a fortune selling wheelchairs and canes."

Alexa Hirsch, 79, hopes to enter her eighth decade free from the fear of a knee replacement. Injured years ago while ice skating, she underwent two major surgeries. "The knee's sort of a mess," she said.

At Addie's, she works on strengthening the muscles supporting her knee, improving her balance ("I was shocked to find it's not that good") and strengthening her arms.

"Every week when I go to church, I hear about a sweet old thing who fell and broke something," she said. "I don't want it to be me."

Tyler Merrill, 29, started working with seniors a few years ago as an intern in University of California San Diego's Department of Orthopaedics. Then he managed UCSD's WellStrong, a gym staffed by medical exercise specialists.

Some of his clients followed him to Addie's, where he teams with Ty Roberts, 29, and Addie Merrill, his 27-year-old wife.

"For seniors, keeping active as they age seems to be the most important goal," he said. "Some of these older clients train similar to those in their 20s. The weight's just a little different."

Functional fitness - the foundation of an independent lifestyle - is the operative term here. Looking better and younger is a bonus.

"The only way I knew I had changed was remarks from friends," Shelton said. "'What are you doing?'" they said. I was amazed at the

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