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HEALTH

Re-educating the brain, muscles

Get younger by moving the correct way

SHARON SULLIVAN
 SSULLIVAN@GJFREEPRESS.COM

To a newcomer, Carol Welch's BioSomatics class appears somewhat like yoga, only it's more subtle and less strenuous. Welch refers to it as "the missing link in fitness."

Welch, who has a background in dance and yoga, developed BioSomatics based on the work of Thomas Hanna, who taught that most chronic muscular pain could be alleviated by teaching the brain to re-learn (because we used to know how) to relax, and move muscles properly.

Welch refers to that memory loss of how muscles should feel, along with our ability to control them, as "sensory motor amnesia."

BioSomatic movement helps people unlearn and reverse harmful responses, Welch said.

"What we do in here is purely brain work," Welch told a class recently at the Academy of Yoga, where she's held her quarterly class series.

The goal is "to have so much awareness in the body, that we can self-correct," Welch said.

"It's about the health of our joints, it's about loosening, and stabilizing rather than stretching and strengthening."

Colleen Jones, 58, said she finds BioSomatics complementary to the yoga she also practices. She's younger physically than when she first started attending Welch's classes five years ago, she said.

"I used to be very stiff — very disconnected from my body," Jones said. "Probably most of my life I have been."

"I really notice now, when I see people move awkwardly, they look older," Jones said.

At 63, Welch moves like a person less than half her age. When leading an exercise, she sagely addresses the group as "intelligent bodies." A part of the re-education process is to reacquaint people with their "inherent capacity to remain agile," she said.

According to Welch, practicing BioSomatics improves posture, and helps create a full range of motion in all body joints.

Jones said she can now do yoga positions previously unavailable to her.

"It's true physical education," Welch said. "It keeps us awake in our sensory self. With this as a foundation, you're more likely to be successful with yoga, pilates, or even the gym."

Welch has worked in neuromuscular therapy since 1979. As a therapist, Welch wanted to give clients a way to help themselves after treatments. She sought to empower people to help themselves to change pain patterns, and to change postures, she said.

In 1993, she began studying the



PHOTOS BY SHARON SULLIVAN | FREE PRESS

BioSomatics instructor Carol Welch helps students refine their movements during a class last week at the Academy of Yoga. BioSomatics is movement designed to reeducate adult neuro-motor functioning.

work of Hanna and Moshe Feldenkrist, both pioneers in the study of the brain and the way in which it senses and organizes muscles and movement.

Catherine Wilson, 54, has been attending Welch's quarterly classes, as well as private sessions for about a year. Wilson suffered neurological damage in her legs after a bad fall four-and-a-half years ago. BioSomatics was one of the things she did to recover, Wilson said.

"I tell you it really has done enormously good things for me. It was a big key to me getting better," Wilson said.

Nancy Don learned about BioSomatics from her yoga teacher, Chris Coburn, who incorporates a lot of the techniques into her yoga classes. Coburn learned BioSomatics from Welch.

In January, Don began attending Welch's classes for additional instruction.

"I don't have pain anymore," or "when I do I don't even think — I lay on the floor and start moving," Don said.

Welch has taught BioSomatics seminars in Virginia, Wisconsin, California, Texas, Hawaii, Seattle and Canada.

"Whereas traditional exercises make muscles stronger, somatic

movements make the brain more intelligent in sensing and controlling the muscles," Welch said. "It really is brain work, based on early movements."

Toward the end of Tuesday's class, it was time for the final exercise — a guided relaxation led by Welch, while a CD of local harpist Kate Ellis played perfectly in the background.

"What I like the very best is dropping into deep relaxation and letting go of things," Jones said.

SPECIAL CLASS

Welch will teach a BioSomatic approach to "Unshackling the Neck and Shoulders" Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 3-4.

For more information, contact Welch at 970-245-8903, or email at cwelch@biosomatics.com

The next BioSomatic movement class series will be held Jan. 8, 15, 22, 29 in 2013.

Classes are held 4:30-5:45 p.m. and cost \$90. Call Welch for location and more information.