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Summit PT offers alternative to traditional physical therapy

Saturday, July 5, 2003

By DON LIPPER AND ELIZABETH SAGEHORN
Register Correspondence

To paraphrase the old Remington slogan, Melissa Stewart-Kern was so impressed with the results of the physical therapy treatment she received at Summit PT that she joined the company.

Instead of the 30-minute wham, bam, get out the door ma'am treatment she was accustomed to receiving from her HMO, former dancer Stewart-Kern was treated to a 55-minute session from Summit PT owner Jane Chic that featured not only traditional physical therapy, but body-strengthening Gyrotonic and Pilates exercises, as well.

Now, Stewart-Kern has joined Chic at Summit PT, which opened for business in June 1999 in a location five minutes from downtown Napa.

"What makes us unique is that we combine physical therapy (cranio-sacral therapy, myofascial release, joint and soft tissue mobilization) with an exercise prescription, using movement re-education in combination with the treatment," explained Stewart-Kern. "It is a very safe environment for aging clients or people with chronic issues."

This means in addition to traditional physical therapy, Summit PT clients also get a conditioning workout, according to Stewart-Kern.

With 20 years of licensed physical therapy experience under her belt, studio owner Chic says she has seen it all. Most of her clients come to her for treatment for acute or chronic orthopedic problems, especially those in the shoulder, hip, knee or back, she noted. "They're looking for both treatment and prevention," she said. "The other clientele we see are people with system-wide stuff like fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue."

Chic said had heard about the restorative powers of Pilates and decided to go to a training session. "The Pilates repertoire provided a forum for exactly what I was trying to do with my back stabilization patients," she recalled. "It fit right into my training, and I decided to incorporate it into my treatment."

She said she was working at Kaiser Permanente at the time. After completing her certification in Pilates training, Chic gradually started her own practice, opening Summit PT in the summer of 1999.

Chic and her full-time team, which includes Stewart-Kern and physical therapist Debbie Terry, also offer yoga in addition to physical therapy, Pilates and Gyrotonic.

Their ultimate goal is to develop core strength in the pelvic and thoracic girdles, added Stewart-Kern. "It's very beneficial for people who have had injuries and people who are not strong in their trunk. You build both stability and mobility," she said.

Pilates was invented by World War I prisoner of war, Joseph Pilate, according to Stewart-Kern. Pilate took apart the beds of non-ambulatory patients and used the springs and the bed frames to create exercise systems so people could lie down and still exercise. Today, it develops strength in the abdomen, lower back and buttocks while encouraging segmental spinal mobility and long lean muscles in the arms and legs, according to Stewart-Kern.

Gyrotonic was developed by Juliu Horvath to work major muscle groups independently, Stewart-Kern said. It incorporates rhythmic breathing as the body is



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stretched and strengthened, she said.

Summit PT caters to all kinds of folks, Chic added. Some come only for physical therapy treatment. Some have physical therapy once and then come back repeatedly for a guided exercises treatment, and there is a large group that comes just for exercise, she explained. Chic said she usually works with the first and second groups until they are well on their way to being healed, then she turns them over to Stewart-Kern for more emphasis on strength training.

Summit PT has treated people in the valley from ages 16 to 84, Stewart-Kern said. "It is nice to have the variety, I think that it makes a more interesting studio. It is more exciting to work with different clients of different health and levels of fitness," she said.

Stewart-Kern and Chic agree make a dynamic duo, able to complement each other's strengths. "I'm 30, Jane is 20 years older than I am. I have a lifetime of dance training, and she has physical therapy background. It's a nice mix of ages and approaches in our studio. I learn a lot from her expertise and she asks me questions about dance. It creates a nice harmony," said Stewart-Kern

Chic agrees. "We're a good tag team. It's a nice combination for clients. If someone is more complicated, I'll start them. Once the injury is better, she'll take over," she said.

Stewart-Kern said she has seen changes in a lot of clients since she joined the firm two years ago. "All our clients benefit in some way," she said. "I have a tennis player who got a lot more flexibility. People who have had invasive abdominal surgery, sometimes get atrophied musculature so I do a lot of breath work and guided exercises to connect into that area. Strengthening changes people's lives where they no longer have situational incontinence when they laugh. Larger people can take inches off their waistline."

Summit PT recently announced it is going to start offering a semi-private program to accommodate more clients. The company also has a five session introductory package, which includes Pilates and/or Gyrotonic.

Chic said she is happy to see people flooding her studio. "I enjoy spending an hour with everyone," she said. "We don't feel rushed. I can do a good hands-on treatment and add a Pilates session to it. In the physical therapy world, you usually have a half hour or less to spend with people.

"People come here because they are drawn to a place where they can be active participants in getting better. They are very interested in improving and are fun to work with."



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