

Building lifelong fitness

Written by Marjorie Preston
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Linwood physical therapy center helps maturing bodies gain and maintain strength

LINWOOD – Eleanor Hagan spent 26 years in the Atlantic City casino industry. Starting as a bartender at Bally’s Park Place, Hagan moved on to become a floor person and then a dealer at the blackjack, roulette, poker and craps tables.

All the while, she had a second career in mind – one markedly different from the first. Studying nights, weekends, during her work breaks, and in countless stolen moments in between, Hagan worked toward her goal. In 2000, she earned her master’s degree in physical therapy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. She was 50.

“People always said, ‘By the time you graduate, you’re going to be too old; who’s going to want to hire you?’” said Hagan. But her age worked in her favor, she said, giving her the single-mindedness to push past obstacles and the patience to deal effectively with challenged clients.

After working in a number of health care settings – “nursing homes, subacute care homes, outpatient centers, in women’s health” – she decided to concentrate on the geriatric population.

Today Hagan is 62 years old and seems as fit and limber as a girl. She operates Body in Balance Physical Therapy & Fitness Center, new in Linwood. She is a board-certified geriatric specialist certified in Schroth scoliosis rehabilitation, and a certified exercise expert for the aging adult through the American Physical Therapy Association. She specializes in the treatment of back pain, scoliosis, balance disorders and gait dysfunctions.

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Hagan's goal is to keep older adults independent by helping them maintain strength, flexibility and balance; avoid debilitating falls; and build lifelong fitness. She treats both the "well elderly" and the "frail elderly" with cardiovascular health training, wellness education programs, home safety assessments, wound care, and Polestar Pilates for enhanced strength and range of motion.

A cornerstone of Hagan's practice is the Biodex fall-risk screening and conditioning system, which assesses the risk of falling by measuring equilibrium and areas of muscle weakness, helps rehabilitate joint-replacement patients, boosts mobility and treats a number of orthopedic and neurological conditions.

Hagan does not limit her clientele to the senior population. The fitness center – with Keiser, Biodex and SciFit equipment – is open to adults of every age, as well as special-needs clients (Hagan's adult daughter is mentally handicapped).

Body in Balance will also offer a concussion management program aimed at high school athletes.

The therapist, who previously worked at NovaCare and Holy Redeemer Home Care, acknowledged that she is beginning her solo practice when many people her age are retiring.

As the population ages, however, she thinks the timing is just right. She is now pursuing her doctorate.

"My vision for Body in Balance is to provide the aging population tools to live as well as possible throughout their lifespan," Hagan said. "I'm passionate about my career."

Body in Balance is at 314 Central Ave. For information call (609) 365-8499 or see Body in Balance on Facebook.

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