

PUBL: Omaha World-Herald

DATE: 1/10/2009

SECT: COMMUNITY CONNECTION

PAGE: 03K

BYLI: JAIME POTTHAST

CRDT: WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

HEAD: Lifting body and spirit

CHAMPS supports healthy aging through programs offered at 50 Omaha-area churches.

POLLY DUFFIELD, LEFT, AND ANNA MAE WAMRE ENJOY COMPANIONSHIP AND EXERCISE AT DIVINE SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH.

TEXT:

Polly Duffield has always tried to stay active, and she understands the importance of exercising.

"It's one way to stay healthy," she said. "It makes me feel good."

That's why the 86-year-old woman joined the low-impact exercise class offered by the Center for Healthy Aging, Ministries, Programs and Services.

The class, which is taught by volunteer Laura Cushing, is one of many services and events offered by CHAMPS.

The goal of CHAMPS is to support a healthy aging process in five categories: spiritual, emotional, social, physical and financial.

The program, which began in January 2006, is housed at St. Paul Lutheran Church, 13271 Millard Ave.

It started thanks to a grant from the Alegent Health Community Fund, said program director Tom Adams.

The Rev. Lou Forney of St. Paul received the grant, but its intention was to reach beyond one church or congregation, Adams said.

Initially, St. Paul teamed up with St. John Vianney Catholic Church and Faith Westwood United Methodist Church.

Now, more than 50 local churches are affiliated with CHAMPS, Adams said.

It's an advantage, Adams said, for senior citizens to be able to go to their church for help.

"The church really can be a resource for people," he said. "It's a safe and reliable place to go for support."

CHAMPS encourages other churches to get involved and to realize the importance of their older church members, Adams said.

"I think people want to know that their church cares," he said.

CHAMPS offers a variety of classes and events designed to help senior citizens. Those include regular blood pressure screenings, healthy cooking classes and support groups.

In its three years of existence, CHAMPS has received positive feedback, Adams said.

"We're still going strong," he said. "I think we're doing something right."

And the low-impact exercise class is an example of something that has grown and flourished.

When it started in March 2006, the 30-minute class met only on Fridays. When more and more participants began showing up, a Monday class was added.

Nearly three years later, it's still going strong.

Duffield has been coming to the class since its beginning. When she isn't there, she roams the halls of her Omaha apartment for exercise.

But she prefers to work out in a group setting, she said.

"I get a lot of friendships," she said. "We support each other."

Ina Averman of Omaha comes to the class for the people as much as she does for the exercise, she said.

"It's the bonding," she said. "We're all hoping to keep active."

Working with Cushing also helps keep 67-year-old Averman motivated, she said.

"I thought it would be good to have some structured exercise," she said. "Laura is super."

Omahan Fran Witt, 71, hasn't let her August hip replacement surgery keep her from attending.

"At least I'm here and at least I'm moving," she said.

Witt, who also exercises at a local gym, likes the class and exercising with others her age.

"We have a good time," she said.

Contact the writer
444-1367, jaime.pothast@owh.com