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Meet Lafayette's New Senior Workout Instructor

By Cathy Tyson



Seniors participating in the Muscle Shapers class at the Lafayette Community Center Photo Cathy Tyson

The Lafayette Community Center has a brand new exercise instructor for seniors, who contributes more than just upbeat Glen Miller tunes to the Muscle Shapers class.

Along with three pound free weights, Gaila Lebherz brings a wealth of academic dance experience and a lengthy job history of working with older adults in dance and movement therapy. Having taken over from instructor Sherry Ayres, landing this position was part good timing, part kismet.

"The customers are extremely excited," said Annie Blodgett, Community Center Administrative Assistant noting that the seniors insisted, "in a nice way" that a replacement be found. Lebhertz had just moved to Moraga from Carmel at the time.

Lucky class participants at the Center benefit from her academic background. While a student at UC Santa Cruz, Lebherz decided she'd like to be a professional ballerina. But at almost six feet tall - that was not in the cards. So she stayed in school and obtained a B.A. in Theater Arts/Dance from UCSC. Following that, she went to NYU and studied modern dance with the legendary Martha Graham at NYU, graduating with a Master of Fine Arts degree in Theater Arts/Dance. In 1995 Lebherz went back to school and received a Master of Arts in Dance and Movement Therapy from UCLA.

She has put all that training to good use, teaching for ten years in L.A. and three years in Carmel where she worked with seniors as a movement therapist and exercise teacher.

This recent move to Lamorinda, just one in a long line of moves, was due to opera singer husband Louis Lebherz's new status as "Artist in Residence" at Saint Mary's College. Starting from an early age, because her Dad was a diplomat with the Foreign Service; Lebherz has lived all over the world. As a child, wherever the family went, be it Brazil or Venezuela, her mom made sure to sign Gaila up for dance class because it was her passion, and a great way to make new friends. As a young woman, she moved to Germany and Switzerland, then back to the States as Louis' career flourished.

Now at the Lafayette Community Center, she teaches the Muscle Shaper class to active seniors. They really enjoy the fast-paced session, which starts with a fifteen minute warm up, thirty minutes of light weights and fifteen minutes of stretching. Each facet is designed to help with balance and strength and the entire hour is accompanied by upbeat big band music. Classes are held Monday Wednesday and Friday from 10:30 - 11:30.

"Come and try it, the first class is free, see if you like it," encourages Lebherz. Additional classes are just \$5. Just bring your own three pound weights and a cushioned mat. For those who prefer to exercise while seated in a chair, there is talk of starting a Tuesday and Thursday class, with a similar format and perky music. For more information, contact Gaila Lebherz at (925) 388-0624 or the Lafayette Community Center at (925) 284-2232.

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