



Pushing back against Parkinson's

Fitness program offers help —
and hope — for patients

By PAUL LEIGHTON • *Photos by* RYAN McBRIDE

Camille Motta, of Marblehead, stretches her arm while holding a weighted ball during a "Strength in Motion" class for individuals with Parkinson's disease at the Marblehead Council on Aging.





Kim Crowley, a certified personal trainer, leads participants through a weekly “Strength in Motion” class in Marblehead.

When the neurologist first told Laurie Grieves that she had Parkinson’s disease, Grieves had an uncontrollable urge to giggle.

“My automatic response was, ‘Get out!!!!’” she wrote in a blog post about her experience.

A dozen years later, Grieves has long been resigned to the fact that she has Parkinson’s, a progressive disorder of the nervous system that affects movement. But she’s also found help, and hope, in a program called Parkinson’s Fitness.

Parkinson’s Fitness

- ▶ 781-572-5918
- ▶ parkinsonsfitness.org

The 58-year-old Salem resident attends ability-based exercise classes three days a week run by the nonprofit organization, which hosts programs in seven communities North of Boston, including Marblehead.

As she awaits the start of a recent “Balance in Motion” class at the Danvers Senior Center, Grieves shares how the sessions have provided not only physical exercise, but emotional support, in her ongoing battle with Parkinson’s.

“I can’t begin to tell you how much



Jaime Campos photo

Former Marblehead resident Linda Hall, right, who helped launch Parkinson’s Fitness after her husband, Keith, was diagnosed with the disease in 2007, assists Dave Ellenton with an exercise during a class at the Danvers Senior Center.

this organization has helped me,” Grieves says. “It’s frightening how much it has helped me. I could join the Y. But these

are my people.”

Parkinson’s Fitness was started in 2013 by Keith and Linda Hall, who previously



John Vasiliou, center, of Marblehead, enjoys some stretching exercises during class at the Marblehead Council on Aging.

lived in Marblehead before moving to Salem.

Keith, a retired U.S. Navy and commercial airline pilot, was diagnosed with the disease in 2007 at age 55 and was looking for Parkinson's-related therapy without going into Boston.

"There was nothing up here on the North Shore," his wife says.

Linda Hall says she met Dianna Daly, a dancer who specializes in exercise for people with Parkinson's, at a Parkinson's support group in Marblehead in 2013.

The two organized a class in Gloucester, then another one in Marblehead. Those two sessions soon grew to 11.

Today, Parkinson's Fitness offers a mix of classes six days a week in Marblehead, Danvers, Beverly, Salem, Gloucester, Topsfield and Lynnfield. About 200 people take part.

Each class has a theme – fitness, strength, yoga, balance, and boxing and conditioning. Parkinson's Fitness offers the classes at no charge, relying on grants, private donations and fundraisers to pay the instructors. All of the venues offer

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Anne and Rowe Austin stretch their arms while holding a weighted ball between their legs as they work on their strength and flexibility during a class at the Marblehead Council on Aging.

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Kim Crowley brings some positive energy to the Parkinson's Fitness classes in Marblehead.



their space for free.

During a class at the Danvers Senior Center, Daly leads about 20 people through slow movements of their arms and legs. Participants hold onto chairs to help with balance. "When I'm Sixty-Four" by The Beatles plays in the background.

Tony Terrizzi, a 68-year-old North Reading resident, says the classes help him maintain strength. He attends yoga classes on Wednesdays, balance and motion classes on Fridays, and boxing and conditioning classes on Saturdays.

Terrizzi says that he used to referee high school and college hockey games. With Parkinson's, it now takes him 45 minutes to get in and out of the shower. He says the classes "help us keep our strength."

"It reminds us we can do certain things and we can't do certain things," he says. "I don't think I'm getting worse, thanks to these classes."

Parkinson's Fitness doesn't just help the participants.

During the recent class at the Danvers Senior Center, Judy Martino and Pauline Ellenton sit on couches in the lobby while their husbands, who both have Parkinson's, take part.

"This program gives us an hour's break," says Martino, who is 71 and lives in Danvers. "The caregivers have no life. Our life is the Parkinson's patient."

Ellenton, 72, who also lives in Danvers, organized a weekly bowling league for the Parkinson's Fitness participants.

"We're a family, that's what we are," Ellenton says.

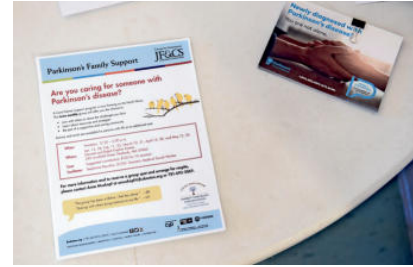
Parkinson's Fitness also offers free workshops that deal with the emotional, as well as physical, impacts of the disease. People with Parkinson's often suffer from social isolation, loss of self-esteem, boredom, depression and a diminished capacity for self-expression, according to

the organization. One recent workshop offered the chance to do "therapeutic drumming."

Linda Hall, who is 66, says that she and Keith, 70, hope to continue the classes for "as long as we can." Nearly 1 million people in the United States have Parkinson's, according to the Parkinson's Foundation.

Grieves says that the classes have helped her stave off the inevitable decline that comes with the disease. They have also kept her from feeling isolated.

"I've never belonged to a group as important as this," she says. 🍌



Information on resources for individuals coping with Parkinson's disease and their caregivers is available at the classes.

'Strength in Motion'

- ▶ **When:** Tuesdays, 11:15 a.m. to noon
- ▶ **Where:** Marblehead Council on Aging, 10 Humphrey St.
- ▶ **About:** This weekly class features a combination of seated and standing stretching and strengthening exercises designed to help improve mobility, stability, strength, endurance, cognition and flexibility. Exercises and activities can be adjusted to each individual's level of fitness and ability.
- ▶ **How much:** Free
- ▶ **Full schedule:** To view all of the classes offered by Parkinson's Fitness, visit parkinsonsfitness.org/class-times-locations.

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