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Business Profile

You're never

too old to ward

off pain, 91-year old

fitness expert says

By Joan Dameron, Inside Tucson Business

Even at 91, Bonnie Prudden, director of Bonnie Prudden Myotherapy® Inc., uses the pain erasure techniques she developed in the 1970's to be in the best shape she's been in for 13 years.

Her eyes sparkle and her 5-foot, 3-inch frame exudes energy as she talks about running a free exercise school for children, starting the first dry ski school and her love of climbing.

Although she undertook these endeavors many years ago, her enthusiasm is contagious. It is hard to imagine that she has bounced back from full hip replacement surgeries and suffered several heart attacks in the past decade.

"You can only get back to where you came from," Prudden said, whether you are recovering from an illness or from an automobile accident. She is back all right, and you can often find the spry, petite great-grandmother in her pool, on her trampoline, or working out on the door frame gym she invented. It is also why she was adamant about initiating children's fitness programs in the late 1940s, when physical education wasn't being taught in schools.

When she started the physical fitness movement, she couldn't call it exercise or dance.

"I called it conditioning," Prudden said.

She became the spokesperson for Sports Illustrated after her findings from research on children's fitness resulted in President Eisenhower forming the President's Council on Youth Fitness.

Prudden has always been active and was a professional dancer by the time she was 10. She also loved riding, swimming, tennis and mountain climbing. An essay she wrote on one of her most difficult climbs, Bonnie's Roof, will appear in the 14th issue of the Alpinist magazine in December.

Climbing partner Dr. Hans Kraus would always put his head and hands on the rock, and silently ask permission to climb. If he had a bad feeling, they wouldn't attempt the climb that day.

"You bet I did it, too," Prudden said.

In fact, it was before a challenging climb that Prudden discovered the benefits of Myotherapy. She had a stiff neck and could barely turn her head. Dr. Kraus, pushed on the back of her head with

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his thumb.

"I thought my eye was going to pop out," Prudden recalled. When he finished, the pain was gone and Prudden could move her neck and they could make the climb.

Her Myotherapy techniques involve identifying painful trigger points that affect the muscles.

"Most pain is muscular in origin," Prudden said.

Do you suffer from back pain or sore shoulder muscles from sitting at a computer all day, or even experience pain from a favorite hobby or occupation? "When you choose your occupation, you very often choose the pain you will suffer later in life," Prudden said. But she insists that you don't have to suffer. "It is pain that ages us, not years."

One of the greatest benefits of Myotherapy treatment is that you can be trained on how to help yourself after an average of three to seven treatments.

"The key to Myotherapy is corrective therapeutic exercise," she explained. The patient does the self help exercises between treatments, which often reduces the number of treatments needed. Leonard Bernstein and Mark McGwire benefited from Prudden's pain erasure methods, as have many other notable figures.

Dr. Andrew Weil has recommended Prudden's methods as an option for treating chronic back pain.

The former Oakland A's trainers have given a testimonial saying "We feel Bonnie Prudden's Myotherapy techniques have made our training methods better and more efficient. In a short time we can give a long time of relief from the discomfort of headaches to foot problems and practically every place in between."

Intensive 15-hour weekend workshops are conducted three times a year and are popular for everyone from massage therapists, registered nurses, physical therapists, chiropractors, and other health care professionals to individuals who want to take a proactive role in their own health care. Muscle pain is often caused by a spasm in a muscle, which sets off a spasm-pain-spasm cycle. Pressure is applied with the hands or elbow to the affected trigger point, which relaxes the muscle and alleviates the pain.

Prudden has worked with many musicians, and did a talk for doctors who were musicians on the side in Aspen. She actually worked on Bernstein at his last performance. Whether you are an artist, musician, painter or practice medicine, Prudden believes it is important to remember that the body is not composed merely of hands. Teachers of any of these pursuits should train students to exercise their bodies, care for them, and keep the muscles free of spasm. The whole body is involved and the entire body is interdependent.

Enid Whittaker, associate director, has worked with Prudden for 33 years. She conducts seminars and demonstrations on Myotherapy, stress relief and fitness for national conferences, clubs and businesses. If a business has the space, Whittaker can hold a workshop on site for up to 25 people. This is an ideal situation because co-workers learn to help each other.

"They will know how to take care of each other's headaches, back and knee pain, shoulder pain, etc.," Whittaker said.

Comments may be e-mailed to editor@azbiz.com or call

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