



Learning to heal

Fitzgerald is leading the way to a healthier body and mind

By Shane Jackson

A physical therapist builds flexibility, strength, and spirit for patients who have limited use of their own bodies due to disability or injury. This year Fitzgerald High School is offering juniors and seniors its first ever Physical Therapy Technician (PT) consortium class. "What is a greater gift than the gift of pain-free mobility?" said Emily Sanders, a senior at Fitzgerald. "Physical therapy is a practice that allows one's life to be restored to the way it was before the immobilizing injury occurred."

Sherry McLaughlin—a Macomb Community College professor who is also recognized as one of the best physical therapists in southeastern Michigan—facilitates the class at Fitzgerald High School.

With extensive training and experience in physical therapy, McLaughlin founded the Michigan Institute for Human Performance (MIHP) in 1998, a consulting and training company which specializes in injury prevention, sport-specific conditioning, and orthopedic rehabilitation.

Teaching alongside McLaughlin is former student Margaret Bales.

"Ms. Bales was an excellent student. She always sat in the front row and diligently took notes. I could tell she was gaining a deep understanding of the material because of the types of questions she would ask. I knew from fairly early on that I would want her to be part of my clinical team," McLaughlin said.

"When I landed the job at Fitzgerald, I knew I needed someone that could be professional, knew the PT profession and could teach. I had prior knowledge that Bales had a teaching degree and that she had a passion to make a difference in young people's lives. Her general curiosity, desire to make a difference and strong work ethic made her a perfect fit."

Originally Ms. Bales attended Denison University



Shane Jackson left, performs a manual muscle test on classmate Jacob Waltiere right.

and received a Bachelor of Arts in English literature and art history. She received her teaching certificate in secondary education in English and psychology from Saginaw Valley State University.

As teaching jobs became scarce, Bales found employment at a sports medicine practice in Port Huron as a physical therapist technician. She instantly fell in love with the profession and enrolled at Macomb Community College to become a physical therapist assistant. "Even though McLaughlin taught a very demanding class, the way she went about teaching with an energetic and enthusiastic attitude made the whole class work harder," Bales said.

"The students at Fitzgerald have a huge advantage over others trying to enter the PT field, or any other medical field for that matter. McLaughlin is so confident in these students that she can teach the material as if it were a college class and the students respond so well," Bales said.

"We hope to inspire high school students to pursue a career in PT. The physical therapy field is extremely

diverse and allows one to practice in various areas such as pediatrics, orthopedics and sports medicine, neurology and geriatrics," said McLaughlin and Bales in a prepared statement. Both instructors hope that when the students of Fitzgerald's PT Tech program graduate, they will strongly consider becoming physical therapists or physical therapy assistants.

With the encouragement and guidance of both instructors, current student Jacob Waltiere says, "I have strongly considered entering the PT field. Seeing your teachers excited to teach inspires you to learn as much as you can, and it even starts to excite you."

In PT class, students first learn the building blocks of physical therapy, known as "The Five Key Facts About Your Body's Design."

■ Everyone is designed to be symmetrical.

■ The human body is designed to move in three planes of motion: sagittal, frontal and transverse.

■ Muscles only learn the lessons they are taught.

■ Though people blame old age or genetics, pain is not inevitable.

■ Pain almost always involves a patient's largest muscle: the gluteus maximums.

In order to be able to stand up and walk around, everyone needs strong support, such as bone. In order to keep the bone in place as well as being able to move around people need muscles as well. Students in the PT class are learning every bone and muscle in the human body. Most importantly, students learn the relationship between muscle and bone. Together the skeletal and muscular

systems work to enable body movement. A simple hand movement or footstep involves various muscle groups throughout the body.

In order to get the most out of your muscles, people such as athletes need to be able to stretch and work them out.

Steve Feldman was brought into the classroom as a special guest to teach the whole class yoga. Steve has been passionate about yoga for years and had opened up a series of yoga shelters.



Kiara Jones, left, is receiving a deep heat ultrasound massage from Christina Gojcay, right, as classmate Jenna Logan, back, looks on.

Feldman is currently giving back to the community by sharing yoga with young people.

Although it may seem easy to some because it involves stretching using one's own body weight, yoga is very physically demanding and requires strict concentration. "By the time that class had ended, everyone in the room was sweating," said Christina Gojcay, a junior at Fitzgerald. Yoga has been proven to

improve muscle flexibility and balance also.

The class has learned how to create their own workout routine catering to a patient's specific area of injury or defect. "I am a pretty physically active person and I loved this section of the curriculum," said senior Jacob Waltiere. "This has helped me develop better work out routines for myself. It taught me the proper techniques to certain workouts as well as weight lifting," — "I was able to share this information with my soccer team in order to improve the workouts conducted during practice."

The physical therapy students are working on giving back to their classmates. Both first and third-hour classes have split into project teams to perform Movewell screenings on all of the athletic teams at Fitzgerald. The Movewell screens are designed to show areas of muscle weakness, tightness, flexibility and stability.

By using the information from the screenings, McLaughlin's think tank team of PT experts will be able to create a "daily dozen" routine unique to each individual sport. The daily dozen routine is a set of twelve exercises that are designed to last 30 minutes total and also improve the range of motion and flexibility of an athlete's particular muscle group.

weeks since I have started the program, and I already have less back pain. I can also feel my back becoming stronger after each workout," Lugowski said.

In order to loosen up stiff muscles, you have to perform a set of massages to that particular area. The first step is called "effleurage" and is used to warm up the muscles and allow the patient to become comfortable with the PT's hands on their body.

The next step is called "petrissage," and its purpose is to relax the muscles through techniques of stroking, strumming and kneading. When performing petrissage, the physical therapist will find hard lumps or will feel the patient twinge when they massage a certain spot on the body, which is called a "trigger point." In order to relieve the trigger point, the PT must apply deep pressure with their thumbs sixty to ninety seconds to "suffocate" the trigger point.

The third step is called "tapotement," which is used to wake up the nervous system through rhythmic percussion, such as cupping, hacking and beating. This wakes up the patient's nervous system, so that when the massage is finished, the patient does not feel groggy and want to fall asleep.

To end the massage on a relaxing note, the PT will perform a few strokes of effleurage.

"This was my favorite section by far," said Christina Gojcay a junior at Fitzgerald. "When we were practicing our massage techniques, it was nice to be able to relieve someone else's stress and tension."

The success and overall enthusiasm of the PT class from the Fitzgerald community will make it likely that the program will continue next year. "This course is an advantage for our students who plan on heading into the medical field," said Carl Shultz, principal of Fitzgerald High School. "Between the hands-on labs and the real life interactions that occur with helping patients, this class goes beyond anatomy and physiology."

"This is a great way for our young people to gain job training as well as people skills that will be useful in college and later on in life. Hopefully, in the future, the PT program will be able to team up with our Henry Ford Health Center to give our students even more job experience, as well as a taste of what a career in PT would be like on a daily basis."

"The daily dozen routine workouts are not as easy as some people may think, said Tyler Lugowski, a soccer player at Fitzgerald. Even though you are using your own body weight to strengthen your areas of weakness, the workouts are still pretty physically demanding," "The screenings are simple and can be completed in five minutes.

It has only been a few



Ms. McLaughlin, right, teaches the class how to properly perform a massage.

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