

COVER STORY

COVER CREDIT

Race has been teaching water fitness for twenty years and believes it is more than good for your body.

Catherin Avalone | The Middletown Press

Water workout good for mind and body

By **SLOAN BREWSTER**
PRESS STAFF

MIDDLETOWN — For 20 years, Cathy Race has kept aquacise students stretching, twisting and bouncing under water.

Thursday marked the 20-year anniversary of the water fitness class Race gives in the swimming pool at Woodrow Wilson Middle School. With tunes like Irene Cara's "Fame" and Michael Jackson's "Thriller" blaring and about 30 students in the water Race took the front of the class, standing out of the water on the tile floor. Like an aerobics instructor she leads students through the moves, the only difference is that they are in the water.

Race's motto is that whatever one does out of the water, one replicates in the pool.

"Keep twisting, we're going to do a turn," Race instructed, moving in rhythm to the beat. "Keep twisting. ... Jog it up. Bounce, cross county stretch. Beautiful! Keep going, build strength in your back, doesn't that feel good? Don't you feel empowered? It's all about getting more in touch with our bodies."

But it is about more than just the physical body. Race believes exercise keeps one mentally fit as well and can be used to heal all sorts of ailments.

"The reward is beyond skin deep," Race said after class. "I said

to them, 'I can't do anything about the years in your life but I can put life in your years.' I tell them, 'I'm your personal coach, we just do it all together.'"

Many of Race's students are senior citizens. Some have participated in the class all 20 years it has been offered by the town's Park & Recreation Department.

Dianne DiGiandomenico is one of the longtime students.

"I love the class; I feel so great when I get out of here," she said. "Water is very easy on your body when you can't do land exercise."

DiGiandomenico insists the class will be part of her life as long as she can participate.

"Forever," she said. "I'll never quit. Never."

Thursday, Mary Anne Bergeron was a first-timer in the class, which she said was awesome.

"I wish I knew sooner," Bergeron said, adding that she intends to come back.

Bergeron has difficulty exercising on land due to pain in her feet, aquacise eliminates the problem as it reduces pressure, she said.

"I can do exercises more comfortably here than on land," Bergeron said.

Bergeron was impressed with Race and agrees with the instructor that exercise does more than help get students physically fit.

"I had a very stressful day today and this helps," she said.

Lori Petras has been taking



Catherine Avalone | The Middletown Press

Cathy Race celebrates 20 years as the water-fitness instructor for the Middletown Park & Recreation Program.

the class for a while and attends intermittently. Her rheumatologist recommended aquacise, she said.

"The reason why I come is because of Cathy and her knowledge and her willingness to answer your specific questions," Petras said. "I enjoy the music she plays."

Race enjoys teaching the class, which is open to anyone.

"What's amazing about this class is that there have been people who come in wheelchairs," she said. "And they all come in the class, and they're all one."

The class, which is officially called water fitness, runs from 7 to 8 p.m. on Mondays and Thursdays

year round at Woodrow Wilson Middle School on Hunting Hill Avenue. Residents pay \$10 for three months and seniors are free. The nonresident fee is \$50 for three months.

Anyone interested or with questions should call the Park & Recreation Department at (860) 343-6620.