

Exercising the body, mind, and spirit



SILVER SNEAKERS in Lawrenceburg pause just long enough for a group photo. Pictured are: Joanne Beckman, Jane Brown, Norman Calvert, Shirley Grissom, Marion Hargrove, Monika Houghton, Mary Jones, Carol Kelso, Emily Kennedy, Paula Kennedy, Vimala Khatri, Kay Kress, Syble Mabry, Sharron Maki, Pauline McCarter, Marilyn McCormick, Nancy Nelson, Ann New, Ora Parrish, Sandi Pettus, Dorothy Richardson, Bobbi Robbins, Harley Simbeck, Martha Simbeck, Lillie Thomas, and Wanda Ward.

By Emily Weathers Kennedy

I was dragged into it kicking and screaming. Well, maybe not literally, but I did begrudge exercise. Hated it, in fact. But when my 80-something-year-old mother began to lose her balance and lower body strength, my sister decided something must be done. She got on the phone from her Nashville home and found Silver Sneakers in Lawrenceburg.

Silver Sneakers is an exercise program intended for older adults. Oftentimes Medicare pays for it, though it only costs \$2 per one-hour session. **The wonderful thing about Silver Sneakers is that anyone at any age can participate.**

The plan was for me to take my mother a few times to get her able to walk in herself and get herself situated. Afterwards, I would drop her off and do my errands before picking her up at the end of the one-hour session. That was the plan at least. What happened was quite different. I went and sat next to my mother as we learned the routines, assisting her with the tubes, weights, and balls (standard equipment for Silver Sneakers participants).

I met the smiling people of all ages but mainly 60s through 80s. I felt young. I was barely 49. But as I struggled to keep up with Marilyn McCormick, the exercise physiologist from Auburn who leads the group, I glanced around. I missed most beats as Marilyn changed routines. By the time I figured out what she was doing, we were on to the next movement.

Those older folks who had been coming to Silver Sneakers for a while, though, were spot on! And, their weights were a different color than my puny 3 pounders that made my arms ache so that I had to put them down between counts. I knew they were lifting at least 4 pounds. I was shamed. Yet, it was hard to care too much because the people were so nice. They cheered Mom and me on, congratulating us for working so hard, thanking us for joining them.

I was hooked. Over the next few weeks, I found myself ignoring Mom's needs as I concentrated on keeping up with Marilyn's rhythm. She introduced little plastic square slides that made my thighs burn, and I thought I would die right then and there. But Dorothy Richardson did them, smiling, with her toned 80-year-old legs. Her pretty daughter, Patty, did them as well, her body amazingly toned and strong. I decided if they could do it, then I could too.

Gradually, my thighs quit burning, and I didn't have to stand up to relieve the pain. Gradually, my body became exercised into shape. I lost inches (and pounds, but who's counting?) and found myself with stamina I never experienced before. The people at Silver Sneakers became my friends, and what a terrific activity to share with friends!

By the time summer came to an end, all three of my daughters had joined me at Silver Sneakers any time they were home and loved it. Even my husband came. (He, by the way, believes it is the best all-around exercise for people of all ages. He was pooped after his first class, and I rose high in his estimation with my ability to keep the pace.)

My cousin, Susanne Reeves, had also been going with us to Silver Sneakers and was hooked as well. She approached me with the idea of bringing Silver Sneakers to Loretto. Since she was a schoolteacher, she would no longer have the luxury of attending midday classes once August rolled around. Marilyn was all for it as were the folks at Loretto City Hall, who allowed us to use the Civic Center and make this a civic, non profit program.

We named it Silver Foxes to distinguish it from its model, Silver Sneakers, as the Loretto program changes direction. Most exercises are the same, but Marilyn has added floor planking and crunching to work core muscles and abs more.

Both Silver Foxes and

Silver Sneakers have participated in events to raise money for charitable causes. Some Silver Foxes drove to Lexington, Alabama, to help Silver Fox friends there with a fundraiser for a breast cancer sufferer.

This event hit close to home because Marilyn is a two-time breast cancer survivor. To say she is an inspiration is an understatement; after surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, she climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa. Only two years later, she leads our classes.

Several of the Sneakers and Foxes participated in the Kiwanis Club Splash of Color Run last fall. I went along to walk the 5K-distance. When I arrived late and sprinted to catch up to my Silver Sneakers friends I had not seen in ages, Marilyn said as I panted, out of breath, "We've been practicing walking and running at Silver Sneakers, so we're going to walk/run the distance."

I reminded her that I didn't run. I hated to run. I didn't even like to walk for exercise, but she took off, not listening. Before long an 80-year-old jogged ahead of me with bouncy steps and that happy smile that brightens her face all the time. Yikes. Once again, Dorothy Richardson had shamed me.

I finished that 5K run with Dorothy. I ran/walked the distance, amazingly energized and only slightly winded. As we stood awaiting results and dusting the powdery colors splashed on us, I was proud, proud of myself and proud of my peeps from Silver Foxes and Silver Sneakers as each one crossed the finish line. More than all that, I was proud to be included and encouraged and set on the right path to good health.

I often remind people that the Silver Sneakers and Silver Foxes classes are for everyone. No one should be intimidated, especially by the younger people who have flocked to our class in Loretto. If people want to sit in their chairs the entire class and move arms and legs, it is a workout and it is good for the body. Marilyn gears the class to appeal to every level, so keeping up the pace is



Marilyn McCormick leading the class with ball exercises



Silver Foxes Kelly Niedergeses, Janet Bradley, Joanne Beckman, Anthonette Beuerlein, and Nan Dean

not necessary. I also remind them to be patient because progress with the muscles and toning is gradual. When Marilyn introduced sit-ups, I couldn't raise myself without help- **at all**. By the second or third lesson, I could do it!

Besides the discovery of exercise and fitness that literally changed my life, I found something equally as vital. I met people for the first time, both those who have lived in our county forever and those who have just moved here. I reconnected with friends and acquaintances I have known since childhood but have never had a chance to get to know, people from all over the county and even North Alabama,

Continued on A-11

"Lawrence County has Gemeinschaftsgefühl in spades. You just have to let it breeze right in." - Emily Weathers Kennedy

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Silver Foxes Katie Quillen and Annelise Kennedy

For more information about Silver Sneakers in Lawrenceburg please call Beth Campbell at Parks and Recreation 762-4231. Silver Sneakers classes meet on Mondays and Wednesdays from 10:00 am to 11:00 am. The cost is \$2 per one-hour session.

For more information about Silver Foxes in Loretto please call Emily Weathers Kennedy at 853-6491. Silver Foxes exercisers meet on Mondays and Thursdays from 4:30 to 5:30 pm at the Loretto Civic Center. The cost is \$2 per one-hour session.



MATT SHIRLEY, an electrician with the maintenance department, was recognized as Support Staff Person of the Month at the School Board's April 14 meeting. Maintenance Supervisor Jon Carter said Shirley "takes great pride in his work," and works long hours to make sure things are operating correctly and safely. He said he was particularly proud of Shirley "because I hired him." Pictured with Shirley, shown at right, is Director of Schools Dr. Bill Heath. *HoJo photo*



TARA MCGILL, a first grade teacher at Summertown Elementary, was recognized as Teacher of the Month at the School Board's April 14 meeting. SES principal Debbie Hughes said McGill came to the school with experience, which was exactly what they needed. "She's always up to any challenge," she added. McGill is also Teacher of the Year from Summertown Elementary. Pictured with her is Director of Schools Dr. Bill Heath. *HoJo photo*

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Exercising the body, mind . . . Continued from A-4

Alabama, people from many denominations of churches and as many backgrounds. As we meet for class after class, we find that we have more and more in common. For example, a lot of us have become interested in the healthy eating habits Marilyn promotes.

Put this all together and you get something the Germans call *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*. It's the feeling you get when you belong, when you feel camaraderie with the people who you were once only loosely associated with. Your common goals become a common spirit. This is what the Silver Sneakers and Silver Foxes evoke, but *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* isn't limited to exercise programs in Lawrence County. You find it all around you when you reach

out to other people and allow them to share your life. It heartens the soul and makes our world here better for everyone.

Lawrence County has



Dot Richardson & Emily Weathers Kennedy

Gemeinschaftsgefühl in spades.

You just have to let it breeze right in (like the wind at your back during a vigorous Silver Foxes work-out!).

Crowd gathers every Saturday... Continued from A-2

have collected close to half a million dollars for local disaster services.

Band members agree that the numbers are significant, but the fun – and love of music – brings them back. The group includes drummer Dr. Clay Wilson, who also plays at his church and was a member of his high school marching band. Lead guitarist Jose Lozano toured for a time with Leon Wilkerson, Lynyrd Skynyrd's former bass player.

The Country Cafe's bass guitarist is Al Chappel of Columbia, who was a member of a folk band in college "That's how old I am," he said. Walter Wood of Pulaski has been part of several groups, and still belongs to Reunion, an oldies band based in Huntsville. They haven't played together in a while, he said. "This keeps

me in practice."

Wright and former Lawrenceburg Commissioner Robert Pulley have been jamming together for 12 years, and play guitar and rhythm guitar, respectively. The Country Cafe is their first band experience.

Several members also sing, but the primary vocalists are Anita Smith, who leads music at her church and also travels as a member of the Tuscaloosa Church of God Trio, and WLX deejay Carolyn Thompson. Thompson has been a backup singer for Cissy Lynn, Loretta's daughter, and has also played with several local bands.

The Country Cafe Band lost a longtime member with the death of Dickie Mayberry, who was also known as the keyboard player for

the Skyliters. Jim Tiedjens, who added some brass to the group with his trumpet, retired last year.

The group plays for other events as well. They are regulars at Oktoberfest in Loretto, played for Woody's 43-year Marine Corps reunion in Nashville last October, and will open for the June 7 Johnny Rodriguez concert at the Crockett Theatre. A portion of the ticket sales, Wright said, will benefit the local chapter of the American Red Cross.



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