

Circles Offer Support For a Healthier Life

BY JOHN BAYLES

•Dump those leftover Christmas cookies. Lose 20 pounds. Stop eating sweets. Cut out all trans fats. Get a membership to the gym.

Some of the most popular New Year's resolutions deal with diet and exercise. Why? Because America has been super-sized. And because America is slowly waking up to the realization that wellness and nutrition can go a long way toward improving life, from how one looks to how one feels.

"We thought this was a good time to get the program started here," said Doug Mercer who founded the not-for-profit East Hampton-based Nutrition for Wellness Foundation in the fall of 2005. Beginning this month, he brings his "wellness circles" to Sag Harbor with the help of local wellness guru Barbara Kinnier.

The idea came from Mercer's own personal experience when, 10 years ago, he started to attempt to take better care of himself. He began by taking the traditional route — going to see a doctor.

"I wasn't getting satisfaction through the normal medical channels," said Mercer. "Then I heard about the Optimum Health Institute in Austin, Texas."

Mercer said a 10-day visit to Austin changed his life. He learned "how miraculous the human body is" and what real "healthy foods" were. He said the next six or so years were a "learning period" and then in the winter of 2005 he was inspired by the boycott at East Hampton Middle School where students protested the "lousy" food served in the cafeteria.

"Here was an opportunity to help people in my own hometown community. To make information available so they could live healthier lives," he said.

His foundation quickly took off and he began holding weekly "wellness circles" at the East Hampton YMCA and at the middle school. He instituted annual wellness seminars at which leading nutrition experts spoke about their research. One such expert was Dr. T. Colin Campbell, author of the best selling book "The China Study."

The book looked at variables of wellness and nutrition by surveying more than 6,000 adults across China and Taiwan and shows the link between nutrition and degenerative diseases like heart disease. It also calls into question popular western diets such as Atkins and South Beach.

"I saw an ad that they were going to be discussing 'The China Study' and got very excited because I was doing my schooling in nutrition and that book aligned everything I'd been taught," said Kinnier. "I was excited that there were other people out there that believed the same things I did."

Kinnier, who has her own private nutrition practice, began taking her clients to the wellness circles in East Hampton. She and Mercer hit it off and Mercer asked her if she would like to run a wellness circle in Sag Harbor.

On Tuesday, January 15 at the Pierson auditorium, Mercer and Kinnier will screen the documentary "Eating" by Michael Anderson, as an introduction to "wellness." People will have the opportunity to buy books and sign up for the free wellness circles, which will be held every Tuesday at 7 p.m. at Pierson beginning January 22.

"What we do," said Mercer, "is empower people through education about what healthy eating really is. Then, for those people who want to change their lifestyle and head in this direction, we provide support."

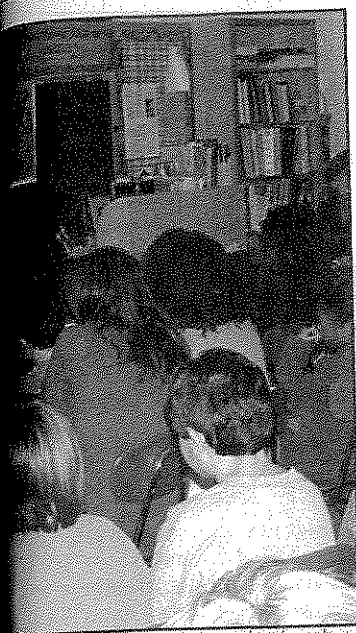
The "support" function of the wellness circles is key. Mercer and Kinnier both said a major factor in deciding to live a healthier life is fear. People fear change. The wellness circles allow people to discuss the challenges they encounter when trying to live a more nutritious lifestyle. They can get recipes and even suggestions where to find the healthiest foods. They can talk to people who are eating healthy and reaping the benefits and see for themselves that it's working for someone else.

The concept is a preventative one that encourages people to be proactive rather than wait for something bad to happen before making adjustments.

"The wellness circles empower people to take charge of their life," said Kinnier. "We don't have to give everything over to the doctor and not be responsible. We need to listen to our bodies and our own symptoms."

Mercer said the problem with America's medical profession is just that, treating the symptoms more than the causes.

"The medical system is pharmaceutically and surgically based and not trained in nutrition," said Mercer. "Right from the get go, the whole health care institution needs to be changed to have a monetary incentive for prevention. The doctors have incentive to prescribe, not to prevent. There's no conversation about lifestyle."



bayles photo



Carroll in Marianne Terrigno's class at East Hampton Middle School (top) and the artificial grass they will be helping to make.

er, Terrigno hopes Carroll can be at least one here in Sag Harbor. Not, a field trip might be in order. I'd like to be able to get the kids to see what exactly happens when you put the mats in the water, even if we have to get on a bus," said Terrigno.

Geonics

The Office of Pollution Control on industrial inspections and sampling, to evaluate influences on ground and surface water, research local management methods and create cost-effective options for groundwater protec-

Pollution prevention is widely accepted as the most cost-effective management approach to protect public health and the environment," said Schneiderman. "We expect it to significantly reduce the chemical contamination of groundwater and surface waters."