

Summary of the February, 2009 Program**“Yoga, Meditation & Massage: Just Relax!”**

Presenters: Sheila Ramos, Stewart Feinman, Germain Kolach

The February meeting of the North Central Florida Post Polio Support Group offered a program led by **Sheila Ramos**, a presenter of programs to all age groups in fitness and art. She is licensed (and insured) and she and her group are members of the Ocala Chamber of Commerce, the Marion Cultural Alliance and the Ocala Art League. Joining her for the presentation in helping to reduce stress, equalize emotions, and introduce relaxation techniques, were therapists **Stewart Feinman** and **Germain Kolach**. They present programs through various groups and organizations, including Prestige 55 and Collins Health Resource Center.

Sheila introduced Stewart, who owns Healing Springs Massage and is a licensed massage therapist who offers yoga and bodybuilding along with massage. Stewart became interested in yoga as a teenager and in the relationship between diet, yoga and exercise. He began his program on the benefits of massage and meditation with a Yoga demonstration.

Stewart explained the importance of having the proper awareness and of getting in touch with our inner selves. The lights were turned down and we were asked to get into a relaxed position in our chairs as best we could. He asked us to allow our eyes to be closed and to relax our neck and our shoulders and become aware of our feet on the floor. He told us to be aware of our breathing and let our minds wander. He had us relax our hands in our laps with our palms up and to visualize a white light and to gently move our palms upward toward our necks, to gently massage the tension from our foreheads. We then continued on, learning how to massage our neck and scalp and then our cheeks, earlobes and face. He had us experience chanting and other awareness techniques. Chanting is like a vibration that can help our minds to relax, it helps us get in touch with our feelings. Chanting centers us and helps us close out distractions.

Stewart continued on with the lesson until we were all quite relaxed. He then asked us our reaction to the yoga exercise. Someone mentioned how we were all able to participate since we were able to do the exercise sitting down and at our own pace.

There are many reasons for muscular pain, such as stress, overuse and spending too long with your neck tilted while operating a computer. Stewart explained the importance of the mind - body - spirit connection. He told us that breathing is very important in keeping your mind off stressful thoughts and that massage therapy can help increase circulation.

Workshops will be offered at the Collins Center in April, May and June, 2009, and handouts will be given at these classes so that those who attend the workshop can continue on with the therapy at home. Couples can attend these classes together to learn how to interact in helping each other. Contact the Collins Center for the time and cost of these classes.

Germain, of Executive Insight, continued the program with a discussion of the importance of body alignment and breathing techniques. In his classes, he takes

individual limitations into consideration and helps people feel good about who they are. He believes in the power of the mind to contact parts of the body to re-stimulate some of the connections through proper breathing, meditation and slow movement. The key element is proper breathing to overcome muscle memory, which restricts our body and keeps it tense. By breathing in a shallow way, we round our shoulders and constrict our thoracic spine, causing fatigue.

There are three parts to proper breathing - using the tummy, the diaphragm, and the upper chest. Germain led us through simple breathing techniques, while listening to relaxing music. He had us breathe in through our nose and sitting tall, to exhale while relaxing our shoulders downward. When relaxed, we have a tendency to breathe shallowly. By breathing up from our diaphragm, we can get oxygen to our brain, which controls our nervous system.

After practicing proper breathing techniques, we were all energized and ready for the rest of the day.

We thanked Germain, Stewart and Sheila for a great program. Those of you who were unable to attend really missed out; we hope you can attend the next time a program like this is offered.

A big “Thank You!” to Carolyn Raville, for putting together such informative and interesting programs this year. We look forward to seeing everyone at our March meeting.

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Summarized by Sharon Daszczyński