

# chestnut hill local

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## 'Motion is the lotion' for Chestnut Hill exercise guru

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*Jenkintown resident Irene Overton, 82, is seen doing leg lifts while Fagerstrom oversees classes with small groups to make sure participants have the proper form.*

by **Barbara Sherf**

“Motion is the lotion,” is the motto you will hear licensed physical therapist Joanne Fagerstrom saying during her two very different and equally popular exercise classes at the Center on the Hill.

Fagerstrom, a youthful looking 59, teaches a combined five (both day an evening) sessions during the week there. Her more rigorous “Taking Charge of Your Bone Health” and more meditative “Awareness Through Movement: Moving Your Body and Exercising Your Mind” have been offered to the public since 2003.

At 5’5” and 127 pounds, Fagerstrom is a walking advertisement for her classes grounded in the Feldenkrais Method®, named for its founder Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais. According to Fagerstrom, a longtime Erdenheim resident, Feldenkrais aims to reduce pain or limitations in movement, to improve physical function and to promote general wellbeing by increasing students’ awareness of themselves and by expanding students’ movement repertoire.

The testimonials in her tri-fold brochures that her husband of 30 years (this November), helped to design are quite impressive.

Retired physical therapist Anne Lowry states: “Joanne’s Super Bones program is truly excellent ... I appreciate the way she includes exercises that strengthen the bones that are most vulnerable to fracture. Also, Joanne’s openness to questions gives a strong sense of participation to all.”

Words on paper look good, but the real testimony comes after taking one of her classes, as Ellen Watson of Wyncote recently did. "It was absolutely a perfect class to be tuned into your body and what is appropriate for you," said Watson after taking her first class.

Chestnut Hill resident Barbara Bloomfield has been taking classes for three years. On a Monday morning, she and her classmates were focusing on the movement of their shoulders. "I'm typically not a very self-aware person in the way the body works, and this hour makes me focus in a way where I always feel better, more relaxed and grounded," said Bloomfield, 70.

Joan Martini, 72, who lives within walking distance of the Center on the Hill, located in the First Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill next to the hospital, has been taking Fagerstrom's classes for three years and is currently enrolled in both classes.

Fagerstrom had worked at Pennsylvania Hospital for over 10 years and decided to stay home when her first child was born with a serious congenital heart defect.

"He's 28 and fine now, but it forced me to look at how precious time is and how I wanted to spend my time," she noted.

She then worked at Chestnut Hill Rehabilitation Hospital for 16 years before it turned into a for-profit entity. "I'm ridiculously loyal and stuck around for far too long," she added, noting that she then did a four-year stint at Northwest Physical Therapy before going out on her own.

"There was this little voice in my head. I wanted to do things my way and spend time with people outside of the medical model. It was a huge leap of faith and I experienced both euphoria and anxiety without the steady paycheck, but overall it's been wonderful and I have no regrets," she said, while putting mats and hand weights away in a neat closet where her 'assistant' Sam the skeleton lives.

Jenkintown resident Irene Overton, 82, is one of the senior members of the classes. "If I didn't come, I wouldn't have the discipline to do it at home," she said. "She's very good and patient and clear in her directions. At my age it helps to keep me moving."

Fagerstrom noted that she has a lot of clients who come out of traditional aerobics or Pilates classes who have injured themselves because they haven't done the exercises correctly. "You need to feel what's happening in your body so you don't hurt yourself," she explained. "I'm interested in the quality of repetitions versus the quantity. If your body is telling you to stop, then stop. There are no judgments."

Fagerstrom's hour-long classes are ongoing, and participants can join at any time. Level I "Super Bones" classes are held Thursday morning at 10:30 and Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. A Level II class is held Mondays at 9 a.m. Her "Awareness Through Movement" classes are held on Mondays at 10:30 a.m. and Wednesdays at 6:45 p.m.

To register call, **267-432-1795** or go to [www.joannefagerstrom.com](http://www.joannefagerstrom.com).