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FEATURE

HEALTHY MENU

THERE ISN'T MUCH THE LOVING HANDS GROUP DOESN'T OFFER ON THE HEALTH AND WELLNESS FRONT

BY THOMAS SKERNIVITZ
PHOTO BY JEAN SCHNELL

When it comes to bands of superheroes, the Loving Hands Group is every bit the health-and-wellness version of the Avengers. Or more appropriately at the moment, the Magnificent Seven.

Based in Cleveland Heights, the organization currently is comprised of seven professional artists and alternative healthcare practitioners who provide the elderly and challenged a variety of life-enriching classes and activities. It offers one-time services or ongoing programs to individuals or groups, either in-home or at group locations.

Founder Judith Eugene exemplifies the breadth of health and wellness-specific programs that are offered by her group. A licensed architect and an interior decorator, she is also a certified yoga instructor, second-level Reiki practitioner, writer, singer, and guitarist.

Although the Loving Hands Group specifically works with seniors and people of any age who are challenged physically or mentally, its roster of activities is a testament to the health-and-wellness benefits that can be derived by any individual or group. Eugene can attest to several of those activities:

ON ARCHITECTURE — “It’s interesting how often people tell me they wanted to be an architect when they grew up, but they weren’t able to for one reason or another. It’s a subject that many people, both men and women, find really fascinating. So I thought people would really enjoy taking classes where they could learn about the history and the



The Loving Hands Group employees (from left) Susan Cady, Natalie Bauman, Marie Smith, Cindy Youkum, and Judith Eugene.

profession of architecture and also be able to ask the questions they always wanted to ask.”

ON INTERIOR DECORATING — “Our homes are where we spend most of our lives, and it’s really important that they help us feel happy, relaxed and comfortable. A lot of people know their homes need improvement, but they just don’t know where to start. And it’s often really hard for the average person to afford to hire an interior decorator. So I decided to empower our clients by teaching them decorator’s “tricks of the trade” so that they can redecorate their homes themselves.”

MUSIC — “Music is such an amazing art form because it’s there in the background of our entire lives. From the time we were babies when our mothers sang us lullabies, to singing with the car radio as teenagers, to our first wedding dance. Music from the past can really bring back a lot of memories and emotions. And singing is really meditative. You can’t think about your troubles and sing at the same time.

GARDENING — “It’s really meditative to turn the soil, plant the seed or plant, water and care for it, and enjoy the fruits of your labor. Gardening also engages all of the senses, which makes it a really holistic form of therapy for people at all levels of mental ability. And you get to use your imagination and creativity, plus a healthy dose of patience. Gardening really gives people a feeling of importance and purpose to know that a living thing depends on them to thrive.”

COOKING — “People sometimes don’t think of cooking as art, but it really is in so many ways. You’re making something with your hands and you’re using creativity to make it look and taste appetizing. Plus, good food really nourishes the soul, and it can also bring back a lot of fond memories of cooking with our parents and grandparents. Most family and social events

have food as an important part of it, so it's something everyone can relate to."

CAR SHOWS — "I am a huge classic car buff, and whenever my car club would have a show, the older spectators, especially the gentlemen, would talk to us for hours about their car memories. It would remind them of the first car they ever had or the car they gave their wife for their first anniversary or the car they had to sell when they went into the service. I started thinking it would be really neat to have car shows right in the parking lot where the seniors live. Now they help us run the shows, vote on the winners, and help hand out trophies."

PET CONNECTIONS — "There are so many homeless pets out there that need love. And there are also a lot of lonely people and people with mental challenges. Connecting them is really a beautiful thing to be able to do. I don't know which it helps more, the people or the animals."

The rest of the lineup at the Loving Hands Group includes:

MAGGIE KIMBLE (MASSAGE THERAPY, REIKI) — "Reiki and massage have been shown to help with things like chronic pain, fibromyalgia, fatigue and nausea associated with chemotherapy, stress-related problems, such as headaches, insomnia, high blood pressure, and compromised immune systems. The one-on-one nurturing care is wonderful for elderly people who may not get enough of that kind of care."

MARIE SMITH (CREATIVE ART) — "Art is a bridge-builder, connecting outer with inner, self and other. It is a helpful tool for focusing on the world around us in an appreciative way and serves often as a path to see differently that which is often overlooked or taken for granted. This includes seeing one's self differently, appreciating one's ability to grow and learn by taking risks and trying new things."

SUSAN CADY (TAI CHI) — "Folks so appreciate learning tai chi movements to melt tension and ease aches and pains. Their payoff is better balance, blood pressure, energy, posture, quality of life and choices in mood for the day. After

the patterns of smooth moves and slow breathing settle in, I sometimes invite everyone to sing a slow familiar song as we 'play' the tai chi. 'My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean' becomes 'My Body Flows Over the Ocean.'"

CINDY YOAKUM (MEDITATION, DREAM INTERPRETATION) —

"Meditation and dream interpretation provide a means of tapping into intuition, which is important when making decisions in life. With ease, we receive guidance to conduct our lives with wisdom, but we are not taught these right-brained techniques in our culture, and instead we tend to rely on left-brained logic and reason. My classes teach how to get off the hamster wheel of obsessive thought and into the flow of intuition. Intuition, once we know how to hear it, aligns the mind with the heart, which allows my clients to reclaim their true selves."

NATALIE BAUMAN (VIDEO/AUDIO LIFE STORIES) — "The funny thing is that nobody ever thinks their story is that extraordinary, but in truth everyone's is. And as people begin sharing the adventures they've experienced with me, I help them see their lives in a different light and their stories as valued. Through the many life stories I've videotaped, I've had the privilege of watching seniors relive their childhood, share how the Depression shaped their lives, the legacies their parents shared that they then share with their kids. The peace people experience by preserving their stories for future generations has really made a difference in my clients' lives."

ELISA TRAVIS (DRAMA ACTIVITIES)

— "Drama is magical. Studies have shown the immense benefits of drama for the elderly. It draws people out and helps them connect with each other. It makes a group of strangers into a family. Beyond the social benefits, participants exercise their imagination and strengthen their cognitive skills. On top of all this, drama is tremendously fun. It heals the spirit by encouraging spontaneity, self-expression, and being present to the moment with all one's senses and being joyful." ■

For more information: lovinghandsgroup.com