Taking baby steps

Aptos’s Precision Wellness Center teaches correct body movement

By Kara Guzman

APRIL • At Precision Wellness Center, a physical therapy and fitness facility on the Cabrillo College campus, adults are re-learning how to move without pain and injury.

Six days a week, the center offers a mechanics class which teaches participants how to correctly move feet, hips and shoulders, to ease pain and prevent injury.

What’s unique about the class is that adults learn to move the way they did as babies, said James Vegher, physical therapist and the program’s designer. Nobody teaches babies to roll, crawl or walk — it’s hard-wired in their genes, he said.

“We teach people to use muscles the way they were designed to move,” Vegher said. “It’s like taking your car to the mechanic for an alignment. We get people to unleash all the bad things they’ve ever learned.”

Move
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Aptos resident Sharon Sequeira, 66, was one of 10 in Friday’s mechanics class, which focused on shoulder blade alignment. Sequeira, a year-long participant, said the exercises have taught her how to get up off the floor and retrieve things from the cupboard, which were previously difficult. She’s even re-learned how to breathe, she said, by keeping her ribcage down and expanding her belly.

“It’s almost like the more I know, the more I don’t know,” she said.

With its slow-paced mat exercises and conscious breathing drills, the class is not a hard-core cardio workout, she said. But learning to use her body has allowed her to train pain-free, and as a result she’s lost 40 pounds this year, she said.

“I have muscles in my armpit, all over that I didn’t know I had,” Sequeira said.

The class is based on a technique from the Prague School of Rehabilitation. The program focuses on building correct movement in positions associated with infant motor development, such as laying on the back with hands and feet up, or crawling.

The class’s popularity has grown from four people in its first offering in 2012 to around 80 people each week, said Vegher.

This motor philosophy informs all the center’s programs, including physical therapy and specific sport training, said Chris Christensen, physical therapist and co-owner with Vegher. The center serves around 700 people, including Cabrillo students, visiting sports teams and the Santa Cruz Warriors, who all learn about body alignment and control, he said.

Joe Alexander, a Warriors player, began receiving physical therapy with Christensen in December, after a stress fracture in his lower leg forced him off the court.

“I hadn’t played for two straight years and there was no end in sight for my injury,” said Alexander, a first-round 2008 NBA draft pick. “After I met Chris, I was on the court playing within two months.”

PRECISION MECHANICS
What: A mat-based movement correction class
When: Eight classes each week, at 7 a.m., 8 a.m., 11 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 5 p.m.
Where: Precision Wellness Center at Cabrillo College, Building HW I, Suite 113B, 6500 Soquel Drive, Aptos
Cost: $95 to $107 per month, depending on package
Details: Visit www.precisionwellnesscenter.com, email nik@pwcabricillo.com or call 831-975-9558.

Alexander said his injury stemmed from how his foot contacted the ground. He said he had to re-learn how to sit, stand, walk, run and jump.

“It was really weird to be a professional athlete doing these really simple-looking exercises but my body would be shaking,” Alexander said. “It was really difficult. It was really new to me.”

Precision’s programs are developed by physical therapists who want to reduce injuries, Christensen said.

“To be fit and stay fit, you have to move well first,” he said.