

Jazzercise coach: Exercise classes aid mental health

By Chelli Perrella

What possesses 105 women of all ages and sizes to come together from one to five times a week to exercise?

Why are the participants smiling and looking as though they are enjoying themselves if this is an exercise program?

The exercise program is called Jazzercise and it's sweeping the country.

Jazzercise was started in 1972 by Judi Sheppard Missett. Conditioning comes gradually as participants move through choreographed routines. The routines are composed of dance movements set to music.

All Jazzercise routines are choreographed by Missett.

In every state

Jazzercise has instructors in every state and seven foreign countries.

Jazzercise was started in Nebraska in 1980 by Candy Shaw. Her first class consisted of only four students. Today there are 29 certified Jazzercise instructors in Nebraska and classes are given throughout the state. There are about 73 Jazzercise classes taught weekly in Lincoln alone. This includes six classes of Junior Jazzercisers.

In December 1980 the first Jazzercise Center was opened. This is unique because there are only five or six other Jazzercise centers in the entire country, said Shaw, founder of the center. Most Jazzercise classes in the country are

taught in other facilities. The Lincoln Center has been so successful that a second center will open next week.

Aids mental health

Shaw said the mental health side of the Jazzercise program is what sets it apart from other programs.



"The participants can be anything they want to be during class. It's a release that is very healthy in developing self esteem," Shaw said.

"Making people feel good about themselves and good about their bodies - that's the key."

Each Jazzercise session lasts one hour. The first ten minutes is spent on warm-up and stretching movements.

The next 12 minutes are devoted to cardio-vascular routines, followed by a cooling down routine where the participants dance to a lying position.

While still on the floor the class does routines to develop different areas of the body. This is followed by dancing back to a standing position and a lively routine so the

session can end on an up beat, Shaw said.

Each selection of music used during a class has a specific routine that accompanies it.

"The program is designed to make fitness a part of your life," Shaw said, "to make exercise fun and easy. Instead

of becoming tired of Jazzercise participants become addicted to it."

Jazzercise is not a program restricted to women. Some men are enrolled in classes.

"It's an excellent program for men," Shaw said. "It improves men's flexibility."

"Jazzercise helps people to get in tune with their bodies. It helps them to become less inhibited with their bodies and feeling good about them," Shaw said.

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