

ALTERNATIVE HEALTH

# Growing Out Of Pain

Horticultural therapy can help patients gain strength, forget ailments

By Mary Beth Breckenridge | Akron Beacon Journal

Therapy isn't always something hospital patients look forward to.

Horticultural therapy is different.

For the four patients in a recent horticultural therapy session at Euclid Hospital in suburban Cleveland, this was a chance to chat, to create and to forget about their ailments for a while. It just so happened they were also working on such goals as improving their endurance and balancing on their feet.

So lifting a scoop of soil was weight-bearing exercise disguised as a creative endeavor. Reaching for plants encouraged them to stand in the midst of a pleasant diversion.

Well, sometimes the exertion was evident. "I'm gonna get a hernia," Thomas Metcalf joked as he struggled to pry apart the enmeshed roots of a spider plant.

Horticultural therapy involves working with plants in a way that benefits people's physical and emotional well-being, said Karen Kennedy, manager of wellness programs at Holden Arboretum and the leader of the class. Research shows working with plants helps people feel better, she said, and the class is designed to capitalize on that by incorporating activities targeted toward such goals as building strength, improving coordination, sharpening cognitive skills and reducing blood pressure.

Cards printed with the patients' individual goals reminded them that this was a didn't seem so much like work.

"It's interesting and fun, and not stressful," Kennedy said. "You're more apt to try if you're motivated to go get that plant."

The emotional benefits were immediately clear. The participants fell into an easy conversation as they worked on creating dish gardens under Kennedy's direction. They shared stories about gardening at home, laughed at their struggles and told each other about their families.

One of the benefits of the program is that it breaks up the tedium of a hospital stay, said Pam Ungar, a certified occupational therapy assistant.

It also helps take the patients' mind off their pain, she said. When the hospital began offering the program, it had participants fill out pain surveys before and after the class. The decrease in pain experienced by the patients was marked, recreational therapist Karen Burns said.

Horticultural therapy is also something patients can continue at home on their own, Kennedy said.

June Nipros seemed set on that. "This is going to fill out, and it will be beautiful," she said, admiring the arrangement she'd created. She fingered the leaves of a tiny plant that hugged the soil in her pot. "I'm anxious for this waffle plant to grow," she said.

Plants, Nipros realized, can get better with time and care. And so can people. ❖

MONTEREY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

# Working to Create a Healthier Salinas



All of these activities and many more like them are part of a new effort called Steps to a Healthier Salinas.

In 2003, Salinas was chosen to be one of 40 unique communities throughout the country that would be included in the Steps to a Healthier US Initiative. This five year program, coordinated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is working to prevent chronic disease and promote wellness by targeting three major diseases—obesity, diabetes and asthma, and the related behaviors of physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use.

The federal government and the Steps to a Healthier Salinas program are focusing on these conditions because of their significance to public health. According to the results of the 2005 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, two-thirds of Salinas adults are overweight or obese. These rates raise concern because being overweight or obese increases the risk of many diseases and health conditions, including coronary heart disease and type 2 diabetes. According

to the CDC, the lifetime risk of developing diabetes is one in three for all Americans, two in five for African Americans and Latinos, and one in two for Latinas. Asthma is the third-ranking cause of hospitalization among children under 15 and one of the leading causes of school absenteeism.

Steps to a Healthier Salinas, a project of the Monterey County Health Department and its numerous partners, is working with many community groups including faith-based organizations and senior centers, schools, businesses, the media, and its community advisory coalition, the Council for a Healthier Salinas, to help improve the health of the community, particularly for those with the highest rates of disease.

Changing the way the community lives and works is not a short-term project. For this reason, the Steps project places a heavy emphasis on supporting organizational and environmental change, working to put lasting and sustainable programs and policies in place that will change the habits of Salinas residents and encourage healthy lifestyles for decades to come. This could mean requiring healthy food options in schools, work places, and faith-based organizations, adopting criteria that promotes fresh local produce in food purchasing contracts, creating smoke-free entryways at privately owned buildings, requiring exercise breaks during long work meetings or retreats, implementing worksite wellness programs, constructing joint-use agreements for public access to school grounds and athletic facilities, building structured exercise activities into after-school programs, creating safe routes to school, "walking school buses" and neighborhood walking groups, or organizing better patient management through chronic disease registries.

Seniors at LUPE/Firehouse Senior Center make new friends and become more active through a new walking group. Jaliscos and Olé taquerias add more healthy options to their menus. Community information in the church bulletin. First Baptist Church eliminates doughnuts during Sunday morning coffee hour. Employees at Ocean Mist and D'Arrigo Brothers attend classes taught by H.E.L.P./Choose Your Life to learn how to serve healthily their families. Community Praise Church includes health and wellness information in the church bulletin. La Princesa and Esperanza markets promote fruits and vegetables at their check out areas. Home day care providers purchase new physical activity equipment with money provided by a United Way administered mini-grant program called Caminemos. Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas more effectively tracks diabetic patients through an on-line patient care registry. The YMCA adds physical activity and nutrition education to the Community Friends After School Program.

This month Steps to a Healthier Salinas is launching a new marketing campaign that will appear in newspapers, radio and TV and outdoor advertising, saturating the community with "Value it...it's the Steps We Take" or "Valórello...son los pasos que tomamos." This message refers to the steps that residents, businesses, faith-based organizations, health providers, and community groups can take together to make Salinas a healthier community.

For more information, call 755-4514 or visit our Web site at: [www.stepstohealthiersalinas.org](http://www.stepstohealthiersalinas.org). ❖

### Value Your Health: It Begins With A Single Step

It's hard to stay in shape these days even though we live in one of the most beautiful parts of the country and enjoy a climate ideal for outdoor activities. Our lives are built around driving cars, eating on the run, and spending free time snacking in front of video games, TV, or the computer. We live in neighborhoods without sidewalks; we are surrounded by high calorie and high fat foods; we drive more than we walk or ride bikes; and our portion sizes keep getting larger.

All of these factors are thought to be contributing to rising rates of obesity—two out of three Americans are overweight or obese—and have diabetes.

At the same time, we want to be healthy not just for ourselves, but for our children, grandchildren and families. And we all know that if we don't increase our activity levels, we might not be able to do that.

The truth is that even small changes in our lives will add up to big results, and we can build on small successes to see change. You may be pressed for time, and your lifestyle may make it difficult to be active and healthy. But that's not a reason to give up. Instead, Steps to a Healthier Salinas encourages you to try integrating better eating and activity habits into your life one by one. Set realistic goals and take small steps to meet them.

### Here are small steps that you can try today:

1. Walk or bike to work.
2. Form a walking group with your co-workers.
3. Get out of your car and take the MST.
4. Use low-fat or fat free milk over whole milk
5. Eat boiled instead of refried beans.
6. Drink water before a meal.
7. Eat half your dessert or share.
8. Buy local produce at a farmers market.
9. Avoid food portions larger than your fist.
10. Ask your friends for their favorite healthy recipes.
11. Grill, steam or bake instead of frying.
12. Try to your place of worship instead of driving.
13. Park farther away in the parking lot.
14. Replace sugar sweetened beverages with water and add a twist of lemon or lime.

15. Form a walking pool to school.
16. Walk a co-workers' desk instead of emailing or calling them.
17. Eat before grocery shopping.
18. Take the stairs.
19. Make fruit smoothies instead of cupcakes.
20. Play soccer with your kids.
21. Take your grandmother for a walk.
22. Play Frisbee with your friends.
23. Take your bike on the bus.
24. Learn to salsa.
25. Walk the sidelines at kids' athletic games.

Adapted from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services smallsteps.gov

For more information go to [www.stepstohealthiersalinas.org](http://www.stepstohealthiersalinas.org) or call (831) 755-4514 for a brochure.



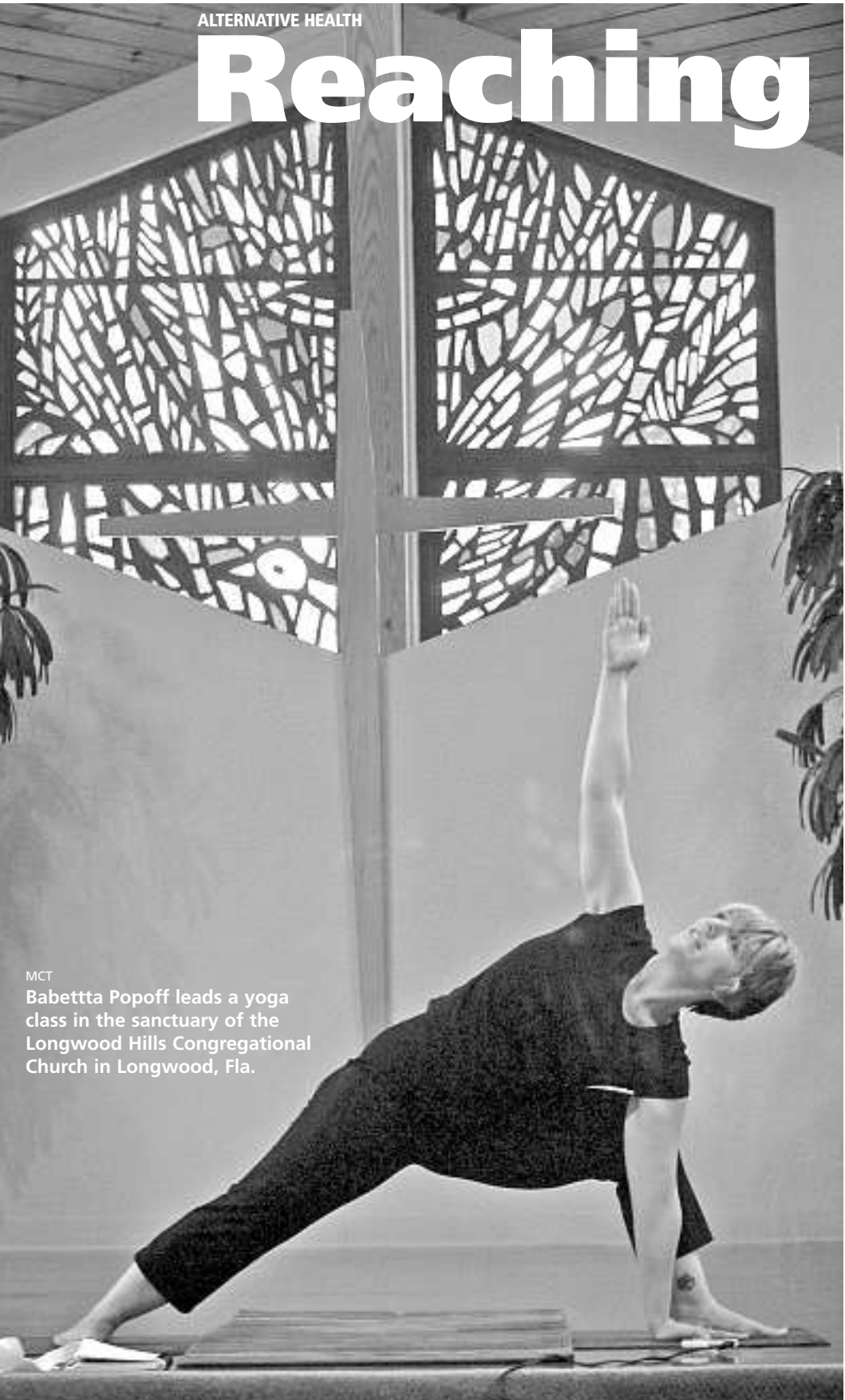
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MCT Babetta Popoff leads a yoga class in the sanctuary of the Longwood Hills Congregational Church in Longwood, Fla.

# toward God

Yoga workshops turn up in churches

By Darryl E. Owens | The Orlando Sentinel

As Susan Bordenkircher sees it, Christians for too long have kept yoga on the mat.

In her new book, "Yoga for Christians," the certified group fitness instructor and a devout Methodist argues Christians should change their posture and stretch their concept of worship to embrace yoga.

Long controversial in some Christian circles, yoga is fast gaining adherents through the new wave of "Christian yoga" across the nation.

"What we are attempting to do with a Christ-centered practice is fill the heart and mind with God, becoming 'single-minded' as Scripture calls it," Bordenkircher says. "With our focus off ourselves and on God, we are creating an atmosphere in which God can work."

Critics contend that with yoga something else is at work. In 2003, the Roman Catholic Church reaffirmed its stance against Eastern practices such as yoga, which it had condemned in 1989, warning that yoga "can degenerate into a cult of the body."

As yoga has become more mainstream, Christian alternatives have emerged. Christian author Laurette Willis has received the most ink with her PraiseMoves philosophy. It keeps yogiclike postures but scraps mantras for scriptural recitation.

Bordenkircher, however, doesn't shrink from the yogic label, noting that "Christ-centered yoga is definitely not just a repackaging of traditional yoga. Yes, the postures are the same, the breathing the same, etcetera, because it is yoga."

The difference, she says, lies in the intention: shifting the focus from self to God with yogic postures ("breathing in" the Holy Spirit, for instance), integrating health as critical to effective godly service, and slowing down enough "from our fast-paced lives to actually hear God's voice."

That appeal has moved churches, such as Longwood Hills Congregational Church in Seminole County, Fla., to host yoga classes. Two years ago, Babetta Popoff rolled out twice-weekly "A Heart at Peace Christian Yoga" there. Classes average a dozen seekers, but Popoff occasionally receives disapproving e-mails that insist yoga has no place in church.

Popoff strongly disagrees. "As Christians, we are given many examples in the Bible of those who took time to quiet themselves in prayer and meditation in order to recon-

nect with God: Isaac, Moses, David and even Jesus," Popoff says. Yoga allows you to "reconnect with your body and your faith and find rest for your soul."

Regardless of the spin, Sannyasin Arumugawami, managing editor of Hinduism Today, says Hinduism is the soul of yoga "based as it is on

**"What we are attempting to do with a Christ-centered practice is fill the heart and mind with God, becoming 'single-minded' as Scripture calls it. With our focus off ourselves and on God, we are creating an atmosphere in which God can work."**

Hindu Scripture and developed by Hindu sages. Yoga opens up new and more refined states of mind, and to understand them one needs to believe in and understand the Hindu way of looking at God. A Christian trying to adapt these practices will likely disrupt their own Christian beliefs."

That yoga would compromise her Christian worldview worried Bordenkircher when she first explored yoga, but she fast fell in love with the practice. In 2001, Bordenkircher, who lives in Alabama, developed her "Outstretched in Worship" classes, which grew into a video series. And now she has the book.

"My goal has been to demystify the practice and reclaim it for Christ as just another way he can begin to heal us from the inside out," she says. ❖