

Personal trainer Andrea Leonard-Bruno (left) helps breast cancer survivor Janice Larsen exercise. Leonard-Bruno is a cancer survivor who has made it her life's work to help others with the disease.

ROBERT BACH
THE OREGONIAN



Personal training

A West Linn woman uses her experiences to create exercise programs

By **NIKA CARLSON**
THE OREGONIAN

Andrea Leonard-Bruno hands her client a plastic broomstick, guiding the woman's form as she raises the stick with outstretched arms.

"It's difficult," Janice Larsen says. "I'm surprised."

It's difficult because Larsen has limited range of motion in her arms after two mastectomies. She says she has trouble performing simple tasks, such as reaching a high kitchen cabinet.

Leonard-Bruno, a West Linn personal trainer, is trying to fix that. After surviving cancer herself, she's made the disease her life's work. Now she develops individual fitness programs tailored to help people cope with the side effects of cancer treatment and teaches others to do the same.

"It's basically about giving somebody their life

back," she says.

She's not a physical therapist, but an exercise specialist who modifies traditional fitness routines to the needs of her clients.

Ten years ago, personal trainers such as Leonard-Bruno were practically unheard of. Research on cancer and exercise was scarce. Though the benefits might seem obvious today, at the time there was no consensus on how and why exercise might help people diagnosed with cancer.

Research has shown that exercise for people who are being treated for cancer makes them physically and emotionally stronger, reduces fatigue and helps them return to work more quickly, says Dr. Anna Schwartz, a University of Washington researcher who specializes in cancer and exercise.

"It really helps patients in every aspect of their

lives, emotionally and physically," she says.

Schwarz says programs such as Leonard-Bruno's are "growing like crazy." She cautions, however, that there are drawbacks to having someone without medical training treating a person with a medical problem.

The specific side-effects that people who are undergoing cancer treatments suffer from need to be addressed delicately, she says.

"It's not rocket science developing the exercise program, but it needs to be done with care," Schwarz says.

Leonard-Bruno says her knowledge comes from working with medical professionals and her own research. The result is a fitness agenda that combines their knowledge of cancer with her knowledge of exercise, she says.

She's not the only one in the Portland area

Please see **SPECIALIST**, Page B2

The Oregonian



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FRIDAY ♦ APRIL 16, 2004

Specialist: Trainer teaches workshops on cancer, exercise

Continued from Page B1

who is addressing the exercise needs of cancer patients. But Leonard-Bruno is unique in that her fitness programs are highly personalized, clients say.

Larsen, her newest client, says she looked for a personal trainer with Leonard-Bruno's knowledge of cancer for eight weeks before she found her.

"I'd been asking anyone and everyone," Larsen says.

Leonard-Bruno's foray into cancer and exercise was inspired by her mother, a breast cancer survivor whose body was ravaged by the treatment.

"My mom wanted me to help her to get back to how she used to be," Leonard-Bruno says.

But she could find no guidance

in creating her mother's exercise program, she says.

"Nobody dealt with the exact needs of a particular cancer patient," Leonard-Bruno says.

She took on the challenge, developing an exercise program for breast cancer survivors with Amy Halverstad, an employee at the fitness center she directed. In 2000, they published an instructional book titled "Essential Exercise for Cancer Survivors."

Leonard-Bruno also is a faculty member of the American Council on Exercise, a national nonprofit fitness education and certification organization. She travels twice a month to cities such as New York and Chicago, teaching workshops.

Mary Malinski, a registered nurse who helps teach Providence Cancer Center's integrative medicine class on cancer and exercise, attended Leonard-Bruno's workshop in January.

"I think the main thing that I got out of it is the need for a woman with breast cancer, when they go to a personal trainer ... to know their special needs," she says.

Leonard-Bruno's clients say the trainer's personal experience with

cancer helps her understand the physical and emotional roller coaster that accompanies the diagnosis.

Jo Robson, a breast cancer survivor, worked with Leonard-Bruno for almost two years and credits her for helping with more than just fitness.

Leonard-Bruno addressed not only her physical needs, but her emotional and mental ones, too, she said.

"I really think she was a critical part of my recovery," Robson said.

Larsen, on the other hand, is just beginning her recovery. She said she sees her fitness program as the last element in her treatment.

In the gym in her garage, Leonard-Bruno tells Larsen she might have better range of motion in her arms if she had been instructed on the right exercises in the past.

"Had somebody given you this information two years ago," she says, "you probably wouldn't be where you are now."

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