

Understanding the Senior Client

Carefully selected equipment and exercises help senior clients thrive.

clients: Nola and Joe

personal trainer: Mary Ann Renzelli

location: Bridgeport, West Virginia



web
extra:

Watch a video of Mary Ann, Nola and Joe at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTW3Yuzqjgs&feature=email

Truly functional fitness. It's never too late to start a fitness program. Just ask married couple Nola and Joe, who started working with IDEA member Mary Ann Renzelli earlier this year. Initially, Nola, 94, approached Renzelli at the recommendation of Nola's daughter who was currently working with the personal trainer. "I wanted to be able to help my husband more around the house and to walk better," Nola recalls. "We have six children, 14 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. We like to attend the weddings and birthdays when we can. We also enjoy going to church on Sundays. We want to be able to continue to do this with our family."

Initially, Renzelli's services were requested to help Nola, but soon she encouraged Joe, 92, to join the sessions. "As I began to work with Nola, I soon found that we could easily involve Joe," Renzelli says. "It worked out perfectly, as they were able to motivate each other."

Joe was also concerned with improved mobility; he is a volunteer for the local Lions Club and spends time selling tickets at the high-school basketball and football games.

Watch, listen, learn. Prior to working with the couple, Renzelli received clearance from their physician to begin a very basic program. Nola had been working with a physical therapist for hip arthritis, so Renzelli made contact to gain feedback on program design. Then, she simply watched. "As Nola and Joe moved about the house, I observed them, assessing their strengths and weaknesses. Next they completed various upper-body move-

ments while seated. I noted what caused discomfort for each of them and quickly became aware of limitations and abilities."

According to Renzelli, the couple spends quite a bit of time sitting in the living room watching television. "However, both are able to complete simple household chores," she adds.

Warm-ups. Renzelli knew that it would be important to start simply and with minimal equipment (e.g., sponge balls, resistance bands and light weights). "We always begin each session with a discussion about the week, the family and how they are feeling," Renzelli says. Nola and Joe appreciate this social time. "Mary Ann does not arrive and say, 'OK, let's go!'" Joe says. "We have a little conversation first. We get to know each other more every week."

Once they've caught up, Renzelli starts the movement portion of the session by incorporating exercises that challenge and warm up large muscle groups. "For example, while seated in our chairs we march forward and backward; step in and out; perform toe taps, heel taps and torso rotations. And we laugh. We also move our arms; swim forward and backward; circle our wrists and ankles." The entire sequence is repeated two or three times to ensure that the couple is well-prepared for the coming workout.

Team training. "Nola and Joe work as a team, engaging in toss and catch with the

sponge ball, as well as abduction and adduction with a ball between the knees and hands. Joe counts to 12 while Nola does the activity, and then she counts and encourages him—usually in Italian." Other exercises include seated rows with a resistance band and biceps curls and overhead presses with the hand weights. "We use a balance pad to step on and off, and we maintain balance while standing on it," Renzelli adds.

Other balance-oriented activities are included before finishing up with some stretching, a yoga meditation and a blessing for good health. "Hugs and handshakes end our sessions," Renzelli says.

Know your client. Renzelli urges other professionals working with clients like Joe and Nola to take it slow and to listen carefully to feedback. "I encourage them to do only what they feel they can do, and not to push if they feel pain. I also ask them to let me know if any exercise frightens them. Always be respectful of senior clients' pain thresholds."

The couple appreciates Renzelli's approach. "She is easy to work with and knows what she's doing," Nola says. "She's always pleasant and patient. I remember now that when I walk I do what she taught me—put my heel down first when I step." ■

Ryan Halvorson is the associate editor for IDEA and a performance specialist at Bird Rock Fit in La Jolla, California.

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