Tighten the belt another Notch

RICHLAND — “It must be nice having all of that energy,” said one woman to another who started stepping in place before the music even started. Shortly thereafter, eleven pairs of feet smacked the floor in unison on the fourth floor of the old Sweat and Commings factory in Richford on Wednesday Dec. 10. Not even the first major snowstorm of the year kept ten program participants and their instructor from their morning exercise routine, though this group was significantly smaller than with good weather.

What started as a six-week exercise program has grown into a community affair and continues every week. Monday, Wednesday and Friday in an unfinished portion of the building now owned by Northern Tier Center for Health (NOTCH) on Main Street in Richford. From 7:30 to 8:15 a.m. on these days, often more than twenty people gather for a full body workout in a social atmosphere while enjoying a view of the Missisquoi River. This early-morning group fitness program is known as “Rise and Shine Longevity Training.”

Rossie Charron is the instructor, certified in Group Fitness, Personal Training and Kick-boxing through the American Fitness Aerobics Association. NOTCH hired her in the summer of 2014 to lead a tri-weekly, functional exercise class that would help people with their daily activities. Some NOTCH providers in the area have been steer- ing their patients towards this class if they believe additional exercise would be ben- eficial. The class is open to members of the public and there is no cost to participants, though donations are encouraged.

Charron’s class starts off slowly with stretching and warm-ups, progress to strength and cardio exercises, and conclude with more cool-down stretching. Initially everyone just used their own body weight, but donations from participants made it possible to purchase hand-weights and strength bands. Some still are more comfortable with using just their body weight.

Everyone has a chair available to incorporate into their exercises as needed, too, which reduced fall risks and makes the program more accessible.

Participants range in age from their 40s to their 90s. There is a mix of abilities as well as age; some run frequently while others do most of their exercise in class. According to Charron and multiple participants, everyone is welcoming to newcomers and encouraging of each other. They also look out for each other and have become a close group that they notice when a regular is missing.

Charron mentioned that many participants have arthritis, so a lot of exercises focus on strengthening and stretching hands and feet. There is also a strong dance compo- nent with a variety of musical genres to improve balance and coordination, as well as cardiovascular conditioning. Charron ensures that everyone works all of their major muscle groups.

Charron is a participant as much as an instructor. “They’re an inspiration to me. When I see how they’re moving, it makes me want to keep moving.”

She has multiple success stories to share, too. One participant with Alzheimer’s disease has shown marked improvement in his condition after starting the class. A gentleman in his nineties excitedly told Charron that he was able open a cabinet that he had previously lacked the strength to do. Yet another has stopped taking daily Advil. One participant in her eighties walks herself to class everyday, and many have started taking the stairs instead of the elevator. “She’ll have in roller skating before it’s done!” cried one student as she left class.

“It’s more than exercise,” though, said Charron. “It’s a social piece for some, too.” Some folks will show up early or stay late just to chat with each other. “I think that’s what a lot of them like it for; it gets them out in the morning.” Both men and women participate, and there are at least five couples who come to class together. Participants currently come from Richford, Montgomery, Berkshire and Enosburg. Participants never to late to join in.

For information on this class, and others that Charron offers, call Rossie Charron at 802-848-7733, or email her at charron.rossie@yahoo.com.

Above, participants take part in an early-morning group fitness program known as Rise and Shine Longevity Training. What started as a six-week exercise program has grown into a community affair and continues every week. Monday, Wednesday and Friday in an unfinished portion of the building now owned by Northern Tier Center for Health (NOTCH) on Main Street in Richford. From 7:30 to 8:15 a.m. on these days, often more than twenty people gather for a full body workout in a social atmosphere while enjoying a view of the Missisquoi River.