

Time to get real about fitness

I've been trying lately to lose 20 pounds, drop a dress size and get really lean and fit in the process. Strengthen my bones, build endurance, become more flexible, improve my balance and straighten my posture. Maybe drive down my cholesterol while I'm at it.

I've actually been working at this for several months, with no discernible change. This is because I've been using, almost exclusively, the "think system" championed by Professor Harold Hill. You may remember Professor Hill from the classic 1962 film "The Music Man," starring Robert Preston in the title role, or the point-



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less 2003 remake with Matthew Broderick. If you go back far enough, you might even have seen the original Broadway production, written by American playwright Meredith Willson, which ran from 1957 to 1961 in some 1,375 performances.

There are some fine theatrical moments and many musical highlights in this terrific show. But these days I'm channeling the moment when traveling con-man Harold Hill tries to persuade wise-to-him Marian the Librarian that he can teach the boys of River City — including her shy little brother, Winthrop — to play their new band instruments by using the "think system." You just envision yourself playing, the theory goes, and it happens. That way, Hill explains, "you don't have to bother with the notes." Simple.

My particular application of the think system involves lying awake at night and berating myself for having gained some weight in the past couple of years. I remember when I was thinner — particularly in the wake of my 2010 divorce — and resolve to lose the "happy weight" that has crept onto my frame since I settled into a contented, stable new relationship. How will I do this? Well, by eating much less and exercising much more, of course. Simple.

I imagine myself pecking at a half-filled dinner plate of steamed vegetables and pushing it away with a sigh. "I'm full," I'll murmur, excusing myself to go out for an evening run. I practice some key phrases. "Just water for me," I'll insist when the wine is being poured, and "No, thanks, I don't really care for sweets."

Between cutting calories and ramping up a vigorous exercise routine, I think, it'll be just a few weeks before I'm slithering back into a size 10 and registering for the Mount Desert Island Marathon. And yet, the weeks go by and it doesn't happen. Because — I hate to break it to you, River City — although a positive attitude is a good starting point, the think system doesn't actually work.

So, this week I cut my losses and invested in a more substantive approach. I decided to start hitting the gym, and then — here's the critical part — I hit it.

Because I work in Bangor, my initial thought was to enroll at the Bangor Y, the University of Maine fitness center in Orono or one of the commercial workout centers. These facilities offer a huge variety of exercise options — including special programs and discounts for seniors — along with great locker rooms and other amenities.

But then I remembered that, right here in tiny Stockton Springs, there is a small, privately owned fitness center. I had seen a flyer posted on the bulletin board at Red's Automotive, and Red himself had been enthusiastic about the place. I learned that the gym, called Fitness is Terrific, is about five minutes from my house. It has limited hours, because the owner has another business to run, and those hours include a "Fit Class" that meets on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at, gulp, 5 a.m.

That's pretty early, and I didn't want to set myself up for fitness failure by committing to an unsustainable workout schedule. But for a number of reasons, it's actually a really sensible time to get in a workout. Plus, I liked the idea of coming back home to shower and change instead of having to bring everything with me to Bangor.

So, with a fit friend along for

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Roger Hanson, 82, tends his beet greens in a raised bed recently at Chamberlain Place, a senior housing facility owned and operated by the Brewer Housing Authority. Hanson took part in a University of Maine research project aimed at assessing the feasibility and benefits of encouraging older people to raise vegetables when they move into congregate housing.

Gardening for health

Study tries to measure if activity improves seniors' diet, well-being



ASHLEY L. CONTI | BDN

Raised garden beds filled with plants can be seen outside the Brewer Housing Authority recently.

BY MEG HASKELL
BDN STAFF

At the end of May, a full-size tractor-trailer delivered 13 heavy, hemlock garden beds to two senior housing facilities at the Brewer Housing Authority. About a dozen residents of Chamberlain Place and The Heritage had agreed to take part in a University of Maine research project aimed at determining whether they could grow a meaningful amount of fresh produce in the raised beds and whether the physical activity, the mental stimulation and the ready availability of vegetables would lead to an improvement in their diets and overall well-being.

Last week, the answer to these questions appeared to be a resounding "yes."

Rows of neatly tended beds overflowed with healthy greens — chard, lettuce, kale, spinach and beet greens. The pungent aromas of basil, tarragon, rosemary and other herbs rose in the heat of the morning sun. Leafy tomato plants planted in buckets were busily setting fruit.

"It's been so nice to go out and get some beets from my garden, and bring them in and wash them off in my sink and cook them and eat them," said 80-year-old Joan Greenlaw, a native of Baileyville.

Greenlaw is one of about a dozen seniors at the housing authority who took part in the summer-long study, which was designed and organized by UMaine assistant professor of nursing Kelley Strout.

Funded with about \$7,000 from the University of Maine Aging Initiative, with additional support from Bangor Greendrinks, the project provided seniors, many of whom are lifelong

gardeners, with the opportunity to get their hands back in the dirt.

And, since fresh produce can be expensive to buy and hard to store, Strout said, it makes sense to give people the materials they need to grow healthy vegetables for their own diets.

"I've always had a garden, ever since I was young," said 78-year-old Ellen Torrey, who hails from Portland. "I've already picked almost all of my lettuce and kale. I had enough to share it with other people in my building."

Roger Hanson, 82, from New Sweden is partial to beet greens.

"I'm not really fond of kale," he said. "Maybe I didn't cook it right. But I've been eating a lot of beet greens."

Hanson said he had so much produce he was able to share it with neighbors, friends at church and a local food pantry.

All participants took part last spring in a baseline assessment of their health status, emotional and cognitive functions, and nutritional intake, conducted by students from the nursing and nutrition programs at UMaine.

As the growing season wraps up, Strout said, the gardeners will update their information, allowing the researchers to measure the impact of the project. She acknowledged that the three-month trial was unlikely to yield significant data, but that over time, she expects to see measurable improvements in diet, health and physical activity.

Strout has applied for external funding to continue and expand the garden project, with a long-term goal of introducing raised-bed gardening to seniors across the state.

While it's unclear whether the garden project in Brewer will continue as a formal re-

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What did I really do this summer?

As the days visibly shorten and the night air takes on a kind of crispness, I find myself evaluating what I've accomplished over the summer before my mind turns to all that needs to be done before God coats my world in ice and snow.

It's been a very busy summer. I barely had time to enjoy any of it,

but I did have some special times with family and friends — and my four Brittany dogs, of course. But I wouldn't say there was much "down" time.

Regardless, I managed to conquer a couple

things on the list I shared with you in April.

I did clean up some of the old rotting apples under the trees on my front lawn in the spring, and I find myself picking up apples now too before I mow. I want to minimize the attractiveness of the area immediately around my house to critters such as porcupines that forage for such delicacies under winter's snows.

I learned my lesson in that regard last winter.

My future son-in-law pruned some trees and bushes for me with his pruning saw, but there's more to do. I've been picking away at the chore as the moment moves me, and as I look at my trees and shrubs and try to envision what I want the result to be.

It's a process, and I can live with that.

But at least I can drive in and out of my driveway without being attacked by overhanging branches. Thank you, Daryl.

My neglected hosta bed got a little attention, although not nearly enough. But the well-established plants seem to be holding their own. The lilac bushes, too, need additional love and care, but I've had a good look at them and have the seed of a plan.

Nothing scarier than a woman with a plan.

The lawn is easier to mow — finally, toward the end of summer. The dirt last winter's plowing had deposited onto the lawn still is in clumps in a couple of places, but most of it is smoothed out again.

I surveyed my yard after spending four hours mowing and trimming on a recent Sunday, and felt like it was mostly under control. The neighbors will not have to gang up on me for a lawn intervention after all.

But you can't win at everything.

I'm thinking since I failed miserably this summer at my second attempt at straw bale gardening, perhaps that particular method is not for me.

The straw bales nestled up against the dogs' chain-link fence from last year's attempt seemed to be just right for planting in the spring. I added the recommended amount of dirt, fertilizer and some pea seeds and watered. And watered. And fertilized. And watered.

The result was a half dozen pea plants that managed to grow about 6 inches high, began to get runners and then just stopped

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New senior center to open in historic Dover-Foxcroft building

BY MEG HASKELL
BDN STAFF

There will come a day when Charlie Buzzell no longer feels comfortable leaving his wife, Dolores Buzzell, alone for even a few minutes while he tends to routine farm chores.

The couple, both in their 80s, have been married for almost 65 years. In 1994, when Dolores Buzzell seemed unlikely to recover from liver transplant surgery, they moved to their historic farm in Milo. They left behind their longtime home near Washington, D.C., where Charlie Buzzell had built a high-level career with the U.S. Department of Education.

"I came home to die," Dolores Buzzell said cheerfully in a recent conversation.

But apparently life on the farm suited her. She made a surprising recovery.

"Her liver's doing just fine these days," Charlie Buzzell said. "But now she's in the early stages of dementia, and we're alone in a big farmhouse with a farm to run."

That's why the Buzzells are pleased about the plan to open a new senior center and an adult day services program in a historic building in nearby Dover-Foxcroft. One day last week, Charlie and Dolores Buzzell got dressed up and took the 20-minute drive to tour the construction site with project organizers, who helped explain the multifaceted project to the Bangor Daily News.

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Chris Moss (left), a volunteer with the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, speaks with Milo resident Charlie Buzzell (center) and geriatrician Dr. Lesley Fernow in Central Hall in Dover-Foxcroft recently. The historic building is being renovated to accommodate both the restored public auditorium and space for a new senior center and adult day services.