

Clark College's Fitness Trainer program drawing rave reviews

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staff reporter

Sometimes a little bit of knowledge can change a person's life.

That's what happened to Cyndi Hughes, a student at Clark College's Fitness Trainer program.

"I had no knowledge of anything about fitness," said the 29-year-old Hughes. "It was just something new and different."

Hughes will complete the program in the spring when she takes her final six credits, but she hasn't had to wait for the benefits provided to her from the education she has acquired.

"It's one of those topics that once you learn about it, you can't go back," Hughes said. "Once you know the effects that bad health habits can have on your life and your loved ones, you learn how to fix them and how easy it is to do so. Most people don't realize what can be done. Once they figure it out, it's like 'wow!'"

The Fitness Trainer program at Clark College is in its fourth year. It is a 90-credit, 2-year program. Upon completion of the program requirements, students will earn an Associate in Applied Science degree.

Students in the program develop knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for working with clients who are interested in improving their health and fitness. Coursework includes both theory and practical application courses related to fitness training.

"It's been taking a while to get the word out that we have the program, that's been the biggest hurdle," said Lisa Borjo, the division chair for Clark

College's health and physical education and Fitness Trainer program. "The motivation to get it started came when students in our regular health classes were telling us things that their trainers were telling them. We got upset about the amount of misinformation they were getting."

The program began with one, 5-credit class and has grown from there.

Hughes was on pace to graduate last spring but a car accident prevented her from completing her final six credits. She suffered a cervical sprain and lost the ability to hold her spine up, leading to several weeks of intensive physical therapy.

"It helped to know exactly what was happening with my body," Hughes said of the knowledge she had acquired from the Fitness Trainer program. "I didn't need as much explanation from my therapist as the average person and I also knew how to design my own post-therapy program."

The Vancouver resident said she was headed toward becoming a teacher when she left her job with the Portland Public School District to join the program at Clark.

"So many people think it's about L.A. Fitness, give me another set of pushups," Hughes said. "It's so much more than that."

While going through the program, Hughes also worked at Clark College in disability support, helping blind students through physical education classes. She is married and she and husband, Joe, live in Vancouver and have three children and one more on the way.

"Hopefully, I will be able to secure a better position with

Clark," said Hughes, referring to after she completes the program in the spring. "So many people take the approach to fitness that it's something they have to do to look good. It's a requirement for a good quality of life. Fitness is the only true way to have a good quality of life."

Like Hughes, Marti Earhart also worked at the college while completing the program. The 42-year-old Earhart, who graduated from the program in June, also works in the Clark bookstore.

"I know that I feel good when I'm active; it's one of my favorite past-times," said Earhart, a Vancouver resident. "I'd like to share that with others who are not so fortunate to know how to do it or know what to do."

Earhart is pursuing one-on-one training. She has also taught water aerobics.

"I thought it was a great education," Earhart said of the Fitness Trainer program. "I've been armed with a lot of information I can use to educate people exactly how the body works. There are just still so many myths that are still out there. People just need to be educated."

With each class that Clark graduates from the program, Borjo feels good about the fact that there will be more people in the community spreading healthy information.

"Everybody in our field is there because of a passion for health and fitness," Borjo said. "We love to be able to teach that to somebody else and fuel their passion."

For more information about Clark College's Fitness Trainer program, visit www.clark.edu/fitnesstrainer on the internet.