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# YMCA and LAF Develop Exercise Programs

BY LENA HUANG

Most people think of the YMCA as swimming lessons, soccer teams, and step aerobics, but not Jo Hopper. For her, the YMCA has been her resource for rehabilitating from cancer.

Diagnosed with lymphoma last year, Hopper suffered from fatigue and exhaustion, side effects of the six rounds of chemotherapy. She searched for help, and found it at the Lake Highlands Family YMCA in Dallas.

“I looked at many other exercise programs, but none were tailored for people who had been through chemo,” says Hopper. “And while I look normal, I don’t feel it. I can’t keep up my endurance, so my goal in this program is to help me get my endurance back.”

The Lake Highlands Family YMCA’s Wellness Enhancement Program that Hopper joined is part of a national initiative sponsored by the Lance Armstrong Foundation and the YMCA to develop exercise and wellness programs specifically for cancer patients and survivors.

Jayson Killough, executive director of the Lake Highlands Family YMCA, says the program started in 2007 with a panel of physicians, professors, and researchers working with LAF and the YMCA to create a general program that could also be individualized for cancer patients.

Ten YMCAs across the country were chosen to test the program, get feedback from their survivor membership, and hone the exercise program based on that feedback for other YMCAs to begin using in 2009. The 10 YMCAs are located in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Boise, Idaho; Charlotte, North Carolina; Providence, Rhode Island; Rochester, New York; Seattle; Milwaukee; Clearwater, Florida; and Dallas.

Trainers from the YMCA were sent to Stanford University to learn exercises and training techniques specific to cancer patients and survivors from a program called Living Strong Living Well.

After gathering that information, the Lake Highlands Family YMCA rolled out its Cancer Recovery Wellness Program in 2008, which includes the Wellness Enhancement Program that Hopper joined, as well as stretch and gentle Pilates classes geared for patients and survivors.

Carmelita Gallo, senior vice president and chief operating officer of the YMCA of Metropolitan Dallas, says the response to the program has been positive.

“We are about connecting people,” says Gallo. “The exercise machines are tools for wellness, but it’s about connecting people and helping them find a community of support now that they are back into life after treatment.”

The YMCA plans to expand the pilot program to 10 additional cities.