



Grace Strojeba/Index
Truman alumna Ashlynn Newman's Zumba class dances Monday at Studio A Fitness. Newman began dancing at the age of 2 and continues dancing with Zumba today.

Studio A Fitness dances for health

BY JENNIFER MARKS
Staff Reporter

Evenings, just past 7 p.m., a flood of grinning women glistening with sweat, towels and athletic shoes in tow, pour out of the new Studio A Fitness in downtown Kirksville. Here, Ashlynn Newman, Truman State alumna and owner, has turned her lifelong passion for dance into a business that allows her to do what she loves and share her enthusiasm with others.

Kirksville's newest workout center, Studio A, located inside the SunSpot, is based on the philosophy that exercise can be fun.

Newman began dancing at 2 years old and danced throughout college at Truman, she said. After graduation, Newman realized how hard it was to stay in shape when she wasn't dancing.

"It gets hard after you're graduated and you're not on a dance team," Newman said. "I wasn't being forced to exercise anymore."

After taking a few Zumba classes, Newman said she was hooked. Since then, she said she has lost 50 pounds in less than a year and received her certification to teach.

Before opening Studio A, Newman said she taught Zumba classes at a nearby church.

"I was teaching out at The Crossing previously," Newman said. "Then I just decided that I wanted to take the next step and open my own place."

After deciding to open her own studio, Newman said she pulled everything together in three weeks. In addition to her full-time job at Complete Family Medicine, Newman said she teaches Zumba five times a week: Monday through Thursday nights at 6 p.m., and Saturday at 9 a.m.

Inspired by a lifetime love of dance, Newman said she picked Zumba instead of other exercise programs because its heavy dance influence manages to make the fitness routines fun and exciting. This blend of dance and exercise attracts women — and occasionally men — of all ages, although people must be at least 14 to take a class at Studio A, Newman said.

At Newman's classes, she said high schoolers and 50-somethings dance side-by-side to Zumba music, which incorporates a broad spectrum of genres.

Newman said she custom choreographs her routines to a lot of popular music, along with Zumba mixed tapes which contain Latin dance style, including salsa, reggaeton, and meringue.

"But there's also the popular music that I bring into it and do those styles to the popular music," Newman said.

Her passion and enthusiasm for both dancing and a healthier lifestyle has been passed down to her students at Studio A.

After taking a few of Newman's classes at The Crossing, Kirksville resident nurse Kristi Zentz said she committed to four nights a week through December but cut back in January to only two nights a week. This cutback, Zentz said, put a damper on her mood.

"When I did that I realized that I was crankier," Zentz said. "I was more tired and I was more stressed."

Zentz said that although she has always hated to exercise, she enjoys Newman's class because it is much fun and so unlike other exercise programs she has tried.

Kirksville resident dental assistant, Ameer Schultz, who also frequents Studio A, agrees. Schultz said she enjoys Newman's classes at Studio A because it is a good time and a good workout.

Like Zentz, Schultz said she noticed a change in her energy and stress levels after Newman's classes at Studio A.

"You feel so much better afterward," Schultz said. "You get to dancing and carrying on and it kind of makes you forget about the bad day you might have had."

Friendship also makes Studio A more enjoyable and different from other places, Schultz said. In addition to a few friends whom she knew beforehand, Schultz said she has become friends with women she's met doing Zumba at Studio A.

Schultz said Newman, who has a smile on her face the entire time she is leading the group, is an excellent instructor who is highly energetic, personable and enthusiastic about her class.



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Ashlynn Newman, Truman State alumna and Studio A Fitness owner, leads a Zumba class at Studio A Fitness, a recently opened gym in downtown Kirksville.

University adopts new mental health system

BY ALEXANDRIA WITT
Staff Reporter

Truman State is one of the first schools in Missouri to adopt a new program aimed at improving mental health.

In an effort to increase awareness concerning mental health, Truman is one of four universities in the state participating in Mental Health First Aid. This program strives to help the public "identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders," according to its website. Truman faculty and staff were trained in the program and are certified to teach MHFA to any interested parties for three years.

The Missouri Department of Mental Health is one of three national organizations authorized to provide the program in the United States, along with the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare and the Maryland State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Developed by Australian mental health specialists four years ago, MHFA is also offered at other Missouri universities, such as the University of Missouri - Columbia, College of the Ozarks and St. Louis Community College.

Joe Hamilton, University Counseling Services assistant director, said he discovered the program after the tornado in Joplin. He said he was looking for a psychological

Mental Health First Aid

- Created by Professor Anthony Jorm and Betty Kitchener at the University of Melbourne, Australia research center.
- Replicated in 14 countries, including England, Scotland, Finland, Canada, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Ireland, Wales and Singapore.
- Studies show that Mental Health First Aid improves the mental health of participants themselves.
- Mental Health First Aid can reduce stigma and improve mental health literacy.

According to mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/background

counseling program that would help prepare UCS staff in the event of a similar disaster. Although the program focuses on basic mental health aid, not psychological counseling, he still said raising awareness for mental health would be beneficial for the University.

Along with Student Health Director Brenda Higgins and Lou Ann Gilchrist, dean of Student Affairs, Hamilton participated in a 40-hour training program last summer to become certified in training individuals in MHFA. The trip trained some Student Affairs staff and Residence Life staff and

student advisers in New Student Programs in the MHFA. Higgins, Gilchrist and Hamilton taught the trainees skills to cope with mental health issues such as suicide or panic attacks, resource books and materials to draw upon and training in reducing any misconceptions about mental health disease.

Hamilton compared the program to learning traditional first-aid techniques and emphasized the importance of treating mental health problems just like any other ailment.

"If you have someone who has cancer, you're going to rally sup-

port around them," Hamilton said. "People will bring food or take care [of them], all those nurturing things, where if someone has depression, we should be providing the same kind of support."

Rachelle Williams, Center for Student Involvement program adviser, participated in one of the training sessions. In previously dealing with mental health issues with student employees, Williams often drew from her own personal experience. With the MHFA program, Williams learned when it is necessary to direct individuals to seek professional help.

One in four American adults experience a mental health disorder in any given year, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. The same source reports that 75 percent of lifelong mental illnesses begin by age 24.

Williams also said MHFA especially was useful in breaking down misconceptions about mental health.

"It really helps you have a new understanding — a different perspective — about something that is a faux pas topic," Williams said. "Mental health is something we should talk about. It's just as important as your physical health and knowing that and helping students understand that is really crucial."

Senior Amanda Schwent, Active Minds member, said she thinks increasing knowledge can decrease fear about starting conversations concerning mental illness. She said programs like MHFA are crucial in increasing that knowledge.

"So many people are ashamed of it, or even scared to touch on the topic," Schwent said. "And therefore, they might not get help themselves or reach out to other people who need help. That can be a huge problem, especially at this age whenever things like depression, anxiety are really common. If the stigma is broken or a lot better a lot more people would get help."