

## **Camp Avenidas fitness academy gets 'em going**

By Joan Aragone

San Mateo County Times

Posted: 07/10/2011 02:07:58 PM PDT

Updated: 07/10/2011 10:21:34 PM PDT

Talk about a program with something for everyone.

Ruth Shafer, 89, of Palo Alto knows she needs more exercise. Her activity of choice is writing poetry, apart from tending to daily tasks. "My daily walks just aren't enough," she told me. "I need more structured exercise."

Carol Pechler, 71, of Menlo Park, on the other hand, runs 20 to 30 miles a week. A retired anthropologist who didn't start running until she was 59, Pechler recently completed her 24th marathon -- at the Great Wall in China - - and is training for another.

Yet both women, friends who met in writing classes at Avenidas Senior Center in Palo Alto, expect to find information, even inspiration, about the benefits of exercise and nutrition at a three-day Camp Avenidas summer fitness academy July 26-28 at Channing House, a retirement community in Palo Alto.

The popular program was first proposed in 1999 by Judith Taksa Webb, manager of lifelong learning and wellness at Avenidas, who noticed that older adults weren't getting the exercise they needed.

"One of the best predictors of aging well is a lifestyle that includes regular exercise and a good balance of healthy food," Webb said at the time. "Lack of understanding of the benefit of regular exercise and good nutrition, and the belief that 'it is too late,' appear to be the primary reasons why more older adults fail to commit to some fitness activity."

So Webb designed a program for people of all fitness levels, using professionals to present lectures on exercise, nutrition, fitness and health, along with demonstrations and opportunities to practice. "Explaining the why of a practice is "... important if you expect somebody to integrate that practice into their lifestyle," she said.

Every year since then, in locations around town, groups of older Peninsulans have gathered to dance, run, walk, practice tai chi, do Zumba, learn Pilates, eat well and hear lectures on nutrition, the mind-body connection and

meditation, among other topics, from scholars, physicians and athletes such as Pechler.

The motto became "fitness, fun and personal growth," Webb said.

"We all need to change the script we learned as young people about what it means to grow old," Pechler said. "Our parents didn't show us the way. They had no advice or models. When I started running, I found it hard to believe this old body could develop muscles. It's not about lengthening our lives but about avoiding invalidism. It is not inevitable that we will suffer from invalidism as we age."

The camp runs from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The fee is \$70 for members and \$100 for nonmembers. For information, go to [www.avenidas.org](http://www.avenidas.org) or call 650-289-5436.

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