

A workout with a view

Beach fitness classes fun, free

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FRANKFORT — Judy Rodes stretched into the plank position on her beach towel and gazed out over the turquoise waters of Lake Michigan to Frankfort Harbor's iconic Frankfort Light.

The core-strengthening exercise was part of a summer beach fitness class aimed at vacationers and others who would rather spend their time outdoors than in a gym.

Visitors gather around the Betsie Hosick Health and Fitness Center flag on Frankfort Beach each Saturday morning for free classes designed to increase strength, flexibility and balance and to decrease stress. The drop-in classes, from early July to late August, ranged from tai chi and yoga to "Core Galore" and "H.I.I.T. the Beach" or high-intensity interval training.

"You're on vacation. Do you really want to go to a gym all day or take a couple classes on the beach?" said fitness specialist Joseph Perrino, who alternates teaching the classes with three other instructors from the Frankfort fitness center.

This is the second summer for the classes, part of the center's six-year-old outreach program which aims to bring classes to community members who can't — or won't — come to the gym.

"We have an interesting dynamic here," said Deb Cenname, a fitness specialist and registered nurse who coordinates programs for the fitness center, part of the Munson Healthcare system. "We have the locals that live here all year round, then people who live here six months, eight months, a week, two weeks."

Cenname said the program is designed to meet people where they're at, whether it's a senior living community or the beach. The center even offers its own workout DVDs for those who winter in warmer climes.

At the last fitness class of the season, Perrino led a group in core exercises taken from Pilates, yoga and dance fundamentals. They shared the sand with a production crew filming a car commercial and families participating in a fly-a-kite event.

The exercises are helpful for people who struggle with balance or for anyone who wants to strengthen their core, said Perrino, a personal trainer.

"Once you stop moving, become sedentary, your balance starts to deteriorate, so getting people in a class and moving again is important," he said. And the beach is the perfect place to start.

"Most people think you need a lot of equipment. I think the beauty of the beach is that you don't," he said. "Everything is done lying down because the sand supports you and molds around you. The sand is forgiving."

Judy Rodes was making a fresh start with the one-hour class. The retired teacher from Frankfort and Philadelphia is a gym member but hadn't made time to exercise all summer.

"I haven't been putting it into my day," she said.

Jane Perrino was taking her husband's class because she likes the combination of exercise and the scenic setting it offers.

"I love being outside," said Perrino, an environmental scientist. "The water is extremely soothing. I like reaching out and touching the soft sand."

Cename said the beach fitness classes are another way to make connections with people in the community and to provide what they need.

"I think we want to make the whole experience of taking care of yourself fun," she said. "I think a lot of times people find a fitness center intimidating."

"We're very lucky that the hospital supports this, because a lot of these classes in different places are free."