

Laughter Yoga: Breathe, giggle, breathe, giggle

By Pat Krochmal

June 21, 2010

Ho ho, ha ha ha. Ho ho, ha ha ha!

The sounds started with a whisper, then became louder and louder.



Residents of the Lincolnwood Place retirement home began laughing softly, giggling, then laughing loud enough to attract others down the hallway to ask what was so funny.

However, participants in the Laughter Yoga class last Thursday were not reacting to anything particularly amusing. They were practicing breathing techniques in an exercise class meant to improve circulation, as well as lift their spirits.

"Breathe in the colors of the rainbow and breathe out all your worries, aches and pains," said Mildred Shaifer, a Lincolnwood Place transportation specialist, who was certified by the American School of Laughter Yoga as a Laughter Yoga leader.

She led the group through head rolls, shoulder shrugs and other light exercises punctuated by snickers to the background rhythms of "My Boy Lollipop" and "It's All Right" as well as other songs.

"Laughter Yoga is a great form of aerobic exercise that is fun, playful and really gets seniors engaged," said Shaifer, who has worked with seniors for 10 years.



"This can really be beneficial. It can literally take the weight off their shoulders -- five pounds off their shoulders if it's done every day for a year," she added.

Phillis Vierman, 88, said the exercise helped her unwind.

"I enjoyed it because you forget about yourself for a while," said Sally Gilman, 97. "But the hardest part for me was the giggling, because I usually giggle at something and there was nothing to giggle at."

Evelyn Goldenberger, another resident, said it wasn't at all what she had expected.

"I thought we'd be whooping like we were in a lunatic asylum, and that wasn't the case," she added. "But it was relaxing."



The free program is open to the community at 2 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month at the center, 7000 N. McCormick Blvd., Lincolnwood.

For more information, call (847) 673-7166.