

Not acting their age

SENIORS | Staying active keeps older crowd in good shape

BY CELESTE BUSK

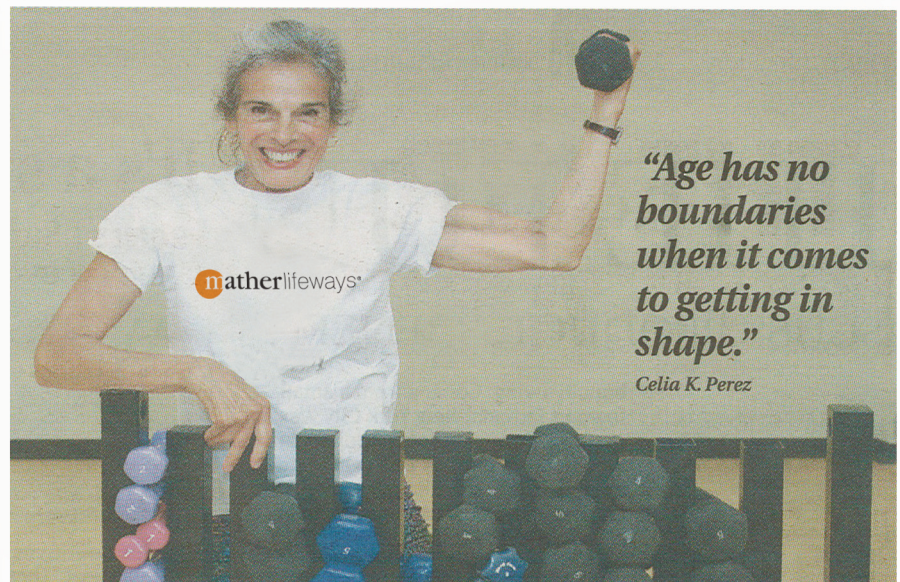
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It's important to have a better understanding of today's active older adults. They're 'younger' than their age indicates, and some seniors can run rings around younger people in the gym."

That's the bottom line on senior exercising from Lee Concha, a spokesman for the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago.

"Yes, our YMCAs have classes specifically for seniors, such as warm-water aquatics for people with arthritis or chair yoga. But the more amazing thing is that so many of our seniors don't need special classes. They are part of our mainstream fitness classes and are participating in sports well into advanced age," Concha said.

Consider Celia K. Perez (a.k.a. CK) who is 76 and in terrific shape. Perez teaches a strength-building class at 10:30 a.m. Thursdays at the McCormick Tribune YMCA, 1834 N. Lawndale. She also teaches water aerobics at 8 a.m. Thursdays at the East Bank Club and an exercise weight loss program at **Mather Lifeways in Evanston**. The classes are geared for all ages. Perez says she has about four or five seniors



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Celia K. Perez

Celia K. Perez, 76, is an instructor at the McCormick Tribune YMCA. She teaches a strength-building class every Thursday.

"drifting in and out" of her classes.

"Age has no boundaries when it comes to getting in shape," said Perez, who lives on the North Side. "I didn't start working out until I was 52. I was busy raising a family and didn't have time to go to the gym."

Perez says specific exercises can help seniors. "I find with seniors there is a reluctance to lift the leg, and many seniors shuffle when they walk and don't use their legs." To help, students in Perez's exercise classes start off with "a little jogging in place."

Concha says exercise is critical to seniors' health and well-being, "not just for a

physical standpoint but from a psychological standpoint as well."

"We can't forget the importance of socialization. Harvard's National Study of Health and Stress indicates that socialization through exercise is a deterrent to depression and anxiety. Other studies indicate that exercise, especially those types that involve physical and mental challenges, can keep a person's mind sharp," Concha said.

There are 20 YMCA wellness centers in the Chicago area. To find the nearest location, call (312) 932-1200 or visit www.ymcachgo.org.