

News tips
Call the newsroom
at (856) 486-2401
to report events
in your town.
(856) 486-2458

Our Towns

BURLINGTON COUNTY

Inside
To find out what's coming up in the next week and beyond, read the Daily Planner.
Page 6

cpcommunities@courierpostonline.com

Our Towns Editor Bob Tulini

Program exercises memory

Brain Gym helps Alzheimer's, dementia patients

By **RENEE R. JANOWICZ**
For the Courier-Post

MOORESTOWN

Colleen Fitzpatrick's job as a memory coach took on a new meaning after her mother's massive stroke.

Helping her mom recover put into perspective just how much Fitzpatrick could affect her clients' everyday quality of life.

"That was a turning point," she said. "That's when my job turned into my passion and my obsession."

Fitzpatrick is a personal trainer of sorts, pushing people with Alzheimer's

disease and dementia to strengthen their brains in ways that can improve everyday conversations and preserve treasured memories.

She saw firsthand how her mom's therapy seemed juvenile and boring to the former teacher, and she tweaked her programs accordingly. Her clients use music, art and electronic games to sharpen brain function. Fitzpatrick delights in the ways one client noticed she was wearing her favorite boots — again — and another memorized key players in a family wedding.

IF YOU GO

■ Mitchell Slutzky, founder of the Brain Gym program, will lead a program seminar March 24 at CareOne at Harmony Village from 8:30 to 10 a.m. Breakfast will be included. CareOne at Harmony Village is located at 301 N. Stanwick Road, Moorestown. Reservations are required by calling **(856) 638-1244**.

"That's a lot of quality-of-life stuff," she said.

Fitzpatrick is a licensed clinical social worker and memory coach at places

See **MEMORY**, Page 4BBC



RENEE R. JANOWICZ/For the Courier-Post
Colleen Fitzpatrick uses a tambourine, electronic keyboard and other instruments in her office, The Brain Gym, at CareOne at Harmony Village in Moorestown.

Dance lessons planned at library

People hoping to learn some basic dance moves or advance their dance skills are invited to learn Zydeco and Cajun dance moves this evening at the Burlington County Library, 5 Pioneer Blvd., Westampton.

Beginner Zydeco and Cajun dance lessons will take place from 7 to 8 p.m. and will provide participants with the basic skills to start dancing.

Intermediate Zydeco and Cajun dance lessons will take place from 8 to 9 p.m. and will provide instruction on more difficult techniques.

The lessons are free. For more information, call (609) 267-9660.

Memory/Program offers brain exercises for elderly patients

Continued from Page 3BBC

like CareOne at Harmony Village in Moorestown, where all residents have memory impairments. She works with them — and a few nonresidents, too — in her office dubbed the Brain Gym.

An electronic keyboard occupies a large share of the desk, alongside a tambourine and a laptop ready for musical games. A shelf stacked with books about art also is home to handheld games that require rapt attention and quick reflexes.

This is where she works with people who struggle to follow a conversation, can't quickly recall their grandchild's name or have trouble staying on course during a walk around their home. Fitzpatrick's job is to coax their brains into forging the connections necessary to make things easier.

Some of her most important tools come from the nonprofessional side of her life: the love of music and art that she studied as a hobby but never pursued for a living.

"I never dreamed that I would find a job that would be so compatible and have such good results," she said.

She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and art, then a master's degree in clinical social work. Along the way she also took classes in sculpture and painting, plus an intensive workshop on music's role in medicine.

In her Brain Gym, Fitzpatrick works one on one with clients by asking them to repeat strings of musical notes that get more challenging after each success. She gives clients a hand-held video

game like Nintendo DS and teaches them how to anticipate action and manipulate tiny buttons to make the animated character move forward and jump obstacles. She flips through pages of a book that show various works of art, prompting them to recall what they discussed during their last visit or how the pieces are similar.

"That's a fun way of activating those memory centers," she said.

Fitzpatrick helped prepare one man for a Christmas visit to the home he had shared with his sister by rehearsing relatives' names and recounting past events. Curtis Brown, 80, used to get a block or two from the house and not know where he was, his sister Clara Bowe said. As they approached the home, it was clear something had changed.

"He said, 'I think I know where I am,'" Bowe said. "When he got to our house he said, 'I lived right there in that house.' This was very unusual."

Bowe, who visits her brother two or three times a week, said he has been remembering more pieces from his everyday life, and she credits Fitzpatrick and the Brain Gym. Brown, a former music teacher, has been showing Fitzpatrick how to play a new song on her office keyboard. During one visit he chastised her for messing up the same part for yet another week.

"I've never been so happy to be yelled at in my whole life," she said. "He was really paying attention."

Reach Renee R. Janowicz at cpcommunities@courierpostonline.com.