



# EXERCISE YOUR YOUTH

## W&M's "Fitness Leadership and Aging" Bridges the Generation Gap

*It's lunchtime on Thursday and the fitness center at the William A. Doig Health Club & Spa is buzzing with activity. Though the health club is open to all Williamsburg Landing residents and community members age 62 and older, young faces are visible all around.*

For the past four years students from the College of William and Mary have been coming to Williamsburg Landing's William A. Doig Health Club & Spa, where they work one-on-one with adults three, sometimes four, times their senior. This experience is made possible by the college's Fitness Leadership and Aging class, part of the Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences, taught by Professor Patricia Kelly Charles.

Under Charles' supervision the students analyze health club members' current exercise programs and adjust them to better fit each client's abilities. This program is available to Williamsburg Landing residents and community members who hold membership privileges at the William A. Doig Health Club & Spa.

The goal of the program is to help

seniors enhance their wellbeing while either improving or maintaining their scores on fitness tests that are conducted upon new member orientation, says Andy Switzer, director of fitness and aquatics at the health club. Health club staff create individual fitness programs based on those tests, which are then adjusted in a "collaborative process between the adult, the students, the professor and health club staff," says Switzer.

Charles teaches her students proper cardiovascular and weight training methods, warm-up and cool-down techniques as well as the basics of designing fitness programs. The students then proceed from theory to practice as they bring this knowledge and training into action.

Once in the gym, students observe health club members while helping them through their exercise program, identifying any weak areas and working towards improvement.

### SUCCESS STORIES

According to Charles, fitness levels vary among the adults, creating very different experiences for each student.

After observing that his client's deficits were mostly balance related, Chris Jensen of Atlanta, Ga., a senior at William and Mary, says he tailors

his client's workouts to involve balancing and strengthening through the hips and core. He has his client doing "very low-resistance [exercises]," and cardiovascular training is done on no-impact, seated elliptical machines.

Marilyn Auza from Virginia Beach is "using weights and other forms of resistance training to hopefully add muscle mass" to her client's frame and to increase bone density, because the client would like to gain muscle.

Brittany Bynum of Richmond participated in the program last spring and worked with a client who enjoyed finding and attempting exercises in fitness magazines, ones that Bynum says were "way beyond her limit." After reviewing the client's fitness program, Bynum helped her client tone down the workouts.

Richard Morris of Richmond, also a student last spring, worked with a client whose multiple health problems required that she drive the 200 meters to the fitness center every day. But by the end of the class, Morris had tailored the fitness plan to work within his client's limitations; at the same time, the client improved her physical fitness so much that she could walk to the health club. From this experience, Morris learned a valuable lesson: "You can push someone a

Left: Jordan Ross of Purcellville, Va., (right) and Natalie Liscio of Richmond, both Kinesiology and Health Science majors, guide Williamsburg Landing resident Judy Brown, 79, through a series of strength-building exercises.

Below: Chris Jensen chats with his client Thomas L. West, 87, also a Landing resident, while West works up a sweat on a seated elliptical machine.



lot harder than they might push themselves."

Williamsburg Landing resident Janet Howard has worked with the students for the past two years. She says that students have "a lot of pep and energy," and when it comes to exercise, "they help me to really stick with it." Esther Gay, who at age 70 is a member of the William A. Doig Health Club & Spa but lives outside of Williamsburg Landing, agrees: "It's easy in a retired life to say, 'Oh, I can do without exercise today,' but in this case I would be letting [the students] down if I didn't show up. I have a commitment to them; they have a commitment to me. It helps me to get there."

### BRIDGING THE GAP

While the program's focus is on fitness, what the older adults enjoy most of all is asking the students about college life and sharing insight into what life was like 50, 60 or even 70 years ago. And that's probably the program's greatest benefit—the ability to bridge the gap between generations.

"Interacting with the young people made me realize that the generations behind me are alright," says Eleanor Dillon, a Williamsburg Landing resident. "[The students] were just grand." 