

Creating a Healing Place for the Community

If your body were a car, you'd keep it well-oiled, wouldn't you? You'd go for the periodic tune-ups, the alignments of the moving parts. Right away you'd have the repairman see what damage that nasty crash did, just to be safe.

Well, human bodies are more precious than Bentleys, but their occupants sometimes lose the way to complete health. The path toward wellness can be blocked by barriers of stress, old injuries and poor maintenance.

On the map in Lakewood, at 1203 Route 70 West, is a destination called the Garden State Center for Holistic Health Care. For many, it's been the stop they've needed to make in a search for a system of care that treats the whole person; a physical, mental and spiritual attunement.

On staff are certified practitioners in bodywork/massage, chiropractic, naturopathy and psychotherapy. On a lively calendar of workshops (some free of charge) are topics from *ayurveda* (the vedic science of life) to super blue-green algae to yoga.

It seems a misnomer to call it all "alternative" therapy just because our country's insurance companies are a little behind. The center's case histories of a 16-year-old's relief from chronic headaches or an 18-month-old child's cessation of head-banging show that there are more ways to cure ills than by popping pills.

Non-invasive bodywork such as craniosacral therapy has even dislodged repressed memories of traumatic events, freeing a client to begin working through an emotional healing process.

Center Founder Gloria Coppola, a single mother of two who is a combination of angelic serenity and down-to-earth approachability, points out that "holistic health" is a new name for a very old concept.

"Holistic health brings us back to basics and to the essential oneness of all systems," she says. With an emphasis on preventative care, "It's knowledge, an attitude, an approach toward life — living holistically means creating support and a commitment to living well." It encompasses all safe methods of treatment, including referrals for medicine or surgery when necessary.

A COMMUNITY NEED IS ANSWERED

Coppola was first a certified massage therapist when she gleaned the idea to start the Garden State Center for Holistic Health Care from clients who asked, essentially, 'How come somebody doesn't open a center around here?'

"So one day I decided to do it," she recalls. "There weren't any local places that educated people on holistic health and provided treatments." Her courage and initiative has certainly been supported by the community.

The center currently hosts the only State-approved massage training course in Ocean County, Coppola said. "Holistic healing is a growing field and people want to learn ways to help themselves and others." In fact, there's now a waiting list for massage training.

She will soon file an application with the State Department of Education to offer a holistic practitioner's training program, a course she intends to be a year-long, intensive program.

"Principally, nurses have been asking for it." They're hearing from patients of conventional medicine, Coppola said, who are "tired of feeling like guinea pigs."

"They're tired of spending money, they're tired of going for a lot of tests that don't say much, and they're weary about not really getting well. They're seeking alternative health, and learning that alternatives are really things that have been around since the beginning of time: like how to pay attention to yourself and how to eat correctly."

HOLISTIC PRACTITIONER

P R O F I L E



GLORIA COPPOLA

THE HEAD BONES ARE CONNECTED TO THE BACK BONES

Old injuries run deep, but so does therapy.

"You generally find that people who are attracted to this are people who have gone through everything," Coppola says of a type of bodywork known as craniosacral therapy — "incredible work," though not easily described to the uninitiated, she admits.

The light-touch manipulative therapy has been effective in treating poorly-understood dysfunctions, chronic pain, lowered vitality and recurring infections. It has gently delved to the root of serious emotional strains.

The name derives from bones of the cranium, down the spine to the sacrum. In 1970, osteopathic physician and surgeon Dr. John Upledger discovered what seemed to be a hydraulic system of the body pulsing along membranes that connect the craniosacral system.

He began refining related work of early 1900's osteopathic student William G. Sunderland, and founded the Palm Beach Gardens-based Upledger Institute, Inc., a clinic and educational resource center.

Trained craniosacral therapists like Coppola have seen amazing results. The therapy can release blocks that Coppola calls energy cysts, which may have been caused by old injuries, physical or even verbal.

"There's a craniosacral rhythm. You can feel in the body if it's dysfunctional or out of sync," she explains. It may be flowing too quickly in one spot, sluggish in another.

"The practitioner strategically places his or her hands in areas where they've picked this up and kind of kick-starts the hydraulic system to functioning."

"Besides correcting problems in the body and posturing disorders, the therapy can go to a much deeper level, because it's affecting tissue memory," Coppola said.

On the premise that our cells store the memory of every event that has ever happened to us, traumatic inflictions can lodge in the body and manifest as pain later. "The impact of a trauma can actually be stored energetically and later on, you can be prone to weakness in that area, infection or whatever, and you might not know why," Coppola illustrated.

Craniosacral therapy has triggered recovery for survivors of incest or other abuses that weren't released through years of counseling, Coppola says, "because so many of their issues revolved around their body."

As the energy blocks begin to release or unwind, that's when memories may come up. Or they may not, if the event was too painful. When the "heavy stuff comes up," so to speak, Coppola makes a requirement that the client see a counselor.

Most people come in for relief of a more common problem — headaches. Their therapy often brings up forgotten memories of what caused the problem in the first place.

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A Community Healing Place

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"The other day, I was working on a 16 year-old young lady who gets headaches," Coppola said. "I was working two points at the back of her head and she said, I can't believe what I just remembered. I was in fourth grade and I remember falling and slipping and hitting the back of my head. I know what I was wearing, I know what color my shoes were."

She remembered everything. What I felt in those bones was that someone had smashed or jammed or locked them, so when she explained the way she fell, it all made sense."

Research is also tracing some childhood problems such as ear infections and attention deficit disorder to the physical trauma of birth on the cranial bones.

"A lot of different things that come on in childhood are because bones got jammed. It could happen at birth or when a baby falls. You see ear infections all the time in kids. Often the cranial bones are just too tight and some simple movements can take the pressure off the eustacean tube."

One dramatic case is that of an 18 month-old boy whose parents were beside themselves over the distress he seemed to be having.

"He was always banging his head; he had breathing problems and he had difficulty focusing on anything," Coppola said. She could immediately feel "the limitation of the craniosacral rhythm in a lot of the bones of the head," she recalls.

"When you have a child who is banging his head or rocking a lot, he is trying to self-correct, his body knows something is wrong. While parents or doctors may suspect a psychological problem, the child may be feeling pressure and simply trying to let it go."

"Our body knows; there is wisdom in our body, and if we listen, it can help us. Children are born with that innate wisdom."

Children self-correct very rapidly with the help of therapy, Coppola said. "With this little boy, after a few things that we initiated, he was sleeping better and he stopped

banging his head. His day care teacher who didn't know he was getting these treatments even reported that his attention had gotten better."

The fact that craniosacral therapy works has been documented. All the hows of its workings may not be written in the medical journals yet — it has been said that a facilitator "uses what energy comes through us" to help the body restore healthy craniosacral rhythm.

What Coppola says she intuitively knew as a child, "that we all have the capability of healing ourselves," is empowered by the center's staff.

In the workshops that supplement the center's programs, she also wants to incorporate some fun into health education — to "lighten the load." Consequently, Center activities have recently included improvisational acting, and local professional harpist Debbie Wilson is scheduled to perform on Wednesday, February 24. Future creative efforts include a *Writing for Self Awareness* workshop on March 24, and a *Tune in and Sing 'Your Song' Harmony for Living Play Shop* on April 30.

When asked about why she includes the arts and creative endeavors as part of this healing environment, Coppola said, "Part of being healthy is having fun. If you wait until you're sick to tend to your needs, it may be a lot harder."

During the last two years, Coppola herself has been re-discovering the role of creativity and play in her own healing journey. She has been taking singing lessons, and she has begun writing poetry and playing guitar again.

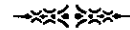
"I used to do these things as a child. Now I realize how important creativity is in making me feel whole. I'm in a better state of mind now; healthier, too. I want to share this with others."

Community service is important, as well. Coppola's staff and associates have been providing holistic treatments including massage, chiropractic, Reiki and naturopathy for AIDS patients. Volunteers have even gone to those without transportation or with other special needs.

"Recently, a nurse who brought one of her patients to the Center was treated to a massage. She was absolutely amazed at how good she felt. She realized she had never taken the time to nurture her own body. She had been too busy taking care of others."

"The need is so great. I feel grateful to be able to serve."

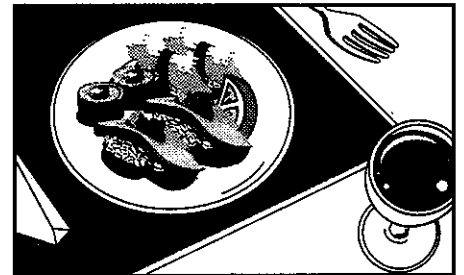
The Center can be reached by calling (908) 364-0882.



The Seashore Vegetarian

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Natural Foods' deli features a daily special, including home-made soups and a featured entree. During my most recent visit, the specials were *Squash soup* and *Tofuna* on 10 grain bread. I opted for *Carrot-raisin salad*, a *Veggie burger* with the works — lettuce, tomato, sprouts, mustard and ketchup, and a bottle of my favorite soda — Reed's extra-strength gingerbrew. Lunch was delicious and nourishing, and under six dollars.



Besides a variety of fresh, reasonably priced salads and packaged meatless sandwiches, the deli sells homemade *Brown Rice burgers*, *Veggie burgers* and *Spinach cakes* for \$1.75 each for creating that special meal at home.

During another one of my visits, I had a *Bean and Soy cheese Burrito* and the soup of the day. Waiting for my meal to be prepared, I had wandered around what may be the best stocked health food store in Ocean County,