

Oakeson Physical Therapy caters to veterans

By **CAROLYN DRYER**
EDITOR

Individuals of all ages and diagnoses relax in the waiting room at Oakeson Physical Therapy in Peoria, ready to begin therapy for their personal needs. Just a few feet away is the aquatic therapy room, where 92-degree water in a 3,000-gallon pool serves a couple of 100-percent, service-connected veterans.

Cheri Ebert, practice manager/director of marketing for Oakeson, said medical personnel at Luke Air Force Base refer patients to the therapy facility, and have also helped her connect with medical professionals at the Veterans Administration hospital in Phoenix. Ebert said she worked at Barrow Neurological Institute for a few years and connected with the VA while employed there.

Ebert opened the aquatic therapy door, where one patient was going through his routine with therapist Stacy Lynch.

Chris Rogers, 34, served three years in the U.S. Army. He was a machine gunner in Afghanistan and a combat lifesaver.

"I had so much gear, it squished my back and wore everything out," Rogers said.

Shortly after being discharged in August 2004, Rogers said he had just four bulging discs in his back, but over the past 14 years, the pain has gotten worse.

He said the VA wants to do surgery, but he points to mixed results he has heard about, and is resisting that alternative. He has already undergone a tri-level fusion in his neck, he said, and within eight months, he had a damaged disc on the other side.

He lived undiagnosed with degenerative disc disease. Today, he has 13 severely damaged discs, nerve damage throughout his body, two bad knees and a separated acromioclavicular (AC) joint in his shoulder.

Rogers finds relief once he hits the water at Oakeson. He has been in the program three weeks.

"I've done water therapy before with really good results," Rogers said. "That's why I came back."

He said the Veterans Administration is paying for therapy through the VA Choice program. Rogers said the aquatic therapy is what has helped him the most. He makes the trip from Wittmann twice a week and is in the water for an hour with Lynch.

"A lot of it is stretching, basic exercises, body mechanics, working on relaxation," Lynch said.

Jay Gustafson of Salome walked into the room, and was ready to take the plunge. Soon, Lynch was removing the ankle weights from Rogers and adjusting them to Gustafson's legs.

Gustafson, 71, is a Navy veteran, who served combat missions during the Vietnam War. He said he was exposed



Photo by Carolyn Dryer

Aquatic therapist Stacy Lynch places weights around Jay Gustafson's ankles.

to Agent Orange and ended his military career with post-traumatic stress disorder and a heart that now operates at 30 percent.

"I can hardly walk out from here to my car," Gustafson said.

Gustafson initially drove to Oakeson twice a week from his home 100 miles away, but now pays a visit once a week. His therapy is paid for six months through the VA.

Lynch said a different plan of care is required for each individual, especially with chronic pain. If 12 or 13 visits are on schedule, it may take just a few times

a week to get better in a short period of time, he said.

"One of my goals was to get on my horse," Gustafson said. "I spent 15 minutes last week on my horse, the first time in 40 years. I have two horses now, a check and a tortoise. I can see for miles out my front door and nothing there."

Rogers said there is a lot less crime where he lives now than where he lived in Tolleson. He said he, his wife and four children have a nice house, and this

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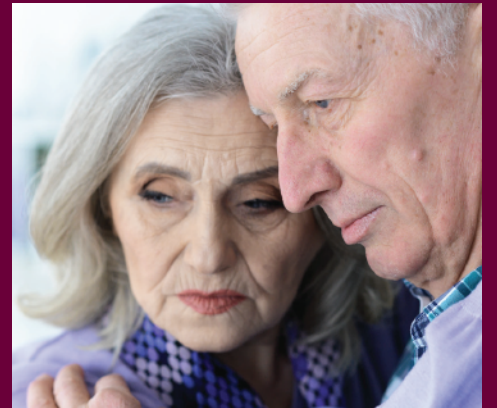
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the Capitol had a chance to meet with us they left town.”

But as the teacher walk-out entered the third day (April 23) of school closures, skepticism remained around the Valley.

“Where is the money coming from and can we even trust him?” Glendale parent Donna Brinkman asked. “I have kids in schools and believe there should be more funding in our schools.”

Others wondered how long the walk-out would continue and how it was starting to affect them personally.

“I agree we need more money for our schools, but walking out is only hurting my kids and my bottom line,” Peoria resident Ray Brown said. “My kids are in their final month at an elementary school here and now they are tacking on these days to the end of the year. Plus, I am going to have to take off days and that is going to hurt me even more, so I don’t think the walk-out was the right thing to do.”

While the plan still needs to be sent through committee before getting to a vote, Ducey spokesperson said House and Senate members were briefed on the details over the weekend, although specifics still had not been released as of press time.

When pressed on why the plan still had not been introduced as of (April 30), Ducey spokesman Daniel Scarpinato said drafting the bills for the plan could take longer, adding it should be released early in the week.

Lawmakers were also questioning the governor’s plan, with most saying they wanted to see specifics before committing to a vote.

As the teachers’ walk-out enters another week, with Deer Valley Unified, Glendale Elementary, Glendale Union High School, Peoria Unified School Districts all saying they would remain closed until further



Photo by Ronald Morrison

Teachers, students and parents march in support of teacher pay raises April 27 at the state Capitol.

notice, parents were starting to waver on their support.

“I agree they need more money and the schools need more funding, but anyone who turns down a 20 percent raise over less than three years, you’re not going to get a lot of support when you walk away from that,” Glendale parent Filomena Sanchez said. “Just take your money and get back to work because my kids want to go back to school.”

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political and academic spheres.”

Hickman founded Public Private Land Strategies LLC, which specialized in real estate, business site selection, infrastructure agreements, zoning, planning, development and public outreach, among other areas.

“I think she is going to be great,” Burg said. “During the transition, she is not going to need much. I am just mainly going to be introducing her to the people, names and faces, and who the department heads are so when they call her for legal advice, she will know what they need.”

Hickman, who also was executive director of Large Landowner Initiatives at Arizona State University W.P. Carey School of Business, said she was thankful for the council’s unanimous approval.

“Mayor and council, thank you so much for your confidence, and I will not let you down,” Hickman said. “I am looking forward to having the opportunity to represent the city.”

She added that during the interview process, she was most impressed with city staff, including Burg.

“Everyone I have met in the city has been fantastic, and they have made this decision easy,” Hickman said. “(Burg) has been amazing, and I look forward to working with him in the transition and jumping into the position.”

Hickman will make \$180,000 per year in her new position, as well as a \$400 per month vehicle allowance and a \$100 per month communications allowance.

When asked why he decided to retire, he said it was just time.

“I have been invested in the retirement system to the max, and basically, I just think it is time to do something different, whatever that may be,” Burg said. “This has been the best job I have ever had, but I am mostly going to miss the people who work here.”

Burg’s last day is July 6.

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summer, they are planning a long trip. Because of his disability, Rogers receives a pension and does not work.

“The good thing is, I don’t have to take time off,” he said. “I just can’t do the things I used to do; have to figure a different way to do it.”

Gustafson said he has 10 children, four of whom he raised while living in Rocky Point, Mexico. He revealed he takes 13 pills a day for one ailment or another.

Both veterans praised the therapy they are receiving at Oakeson.

“These people have done nothing but help me,” Gustafson said.

Rogers went further, giving Lynch the nod, saying he was the most knowledgeable therapist he had ever worked with.

“I’ve been specializing in water therapy the last 12 years, mostly with Alzheimer’s,” Lynch said.

He just returned from hosting the fifth International Conference on Evidence-Based Aquatic Therapy in Las Vegas, where aquatic experts from 24 countries came together to discuss the newest research. Lynch was one of the 11 international keynote speakers. The first case study ever published on aquatic therapy and Alzheimer’s disease was on a patient Lynch worked with in 2012. He recently co-wrote another case study with Dr. Bruce Becker — a world-recognized expert in aquatic therapy research — called “Aquatic Therapy and End-Stage Dementia” that was published in the Physical Medicine and Rehab Journal. Lynch has a number of international aquatic physical therapy certifications.

He said all research has been pointing to physical exercise as the biggest deterrent to Alzheimer’s. Lynch said the Framingham study a few years ago concluded that people who did cardiovascular exercise three times a week had a 300-percent better change of not experiencing Alzheimer’s.

Stacy has a number of international aquatic physical therapy certifications.

Lynch said, “Aquatic therapy is also more than just exercising in a wet medium. Many techniques physical therapists use on land can be performed in the water. As a therapist, we utilize manual therapy, which is a ‘hands-on’ treatment of muscles, tendons, ligaments and joints. On land, the body responds in certain ways due to air pressure and gravity. In the water, we not only add buoyancy (buoyancy and gravity are two different forces), but we also have the principles of hydrostatic pressure, turbulence, drag, viscosity, as well as thermal factors that can modify, and even enhance treatment options. In the water, we can also use other techniques, such as cupping and tuning forks.”

And so, the hour ends and the two veterans go their separate ways, but they’ll be back to Oakeson for another session in a week, ready to slowly step into the warm water for some pain relief.

To learn more about aquatic therapy or specific treatments, call Oakeson at 623-878-9696 or visit oakesonpt.com. Oakeson Physical Therapy is at 8240 W. Cactus Road.