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Renewing 'life-force energy'

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Proof Positive: Reiki Practitioners channel the good vibes



Wendi Hermsen performs Reiki on a client at Superior Massage and Wellness in Appleton.

Please note while reading the article that I am now a Reiki Master Teacher, and have been with Peaceful Spirit, LLC since April 2007. Superior Massage and Wellness Center closed during Spring 2007. Enjoy! Wendi Hermsen

By Wendy Harris

For years, Allison Gerard had turned to the occasional deep-tissue massage to ease the daily accumulation of stress. Then nine months ago, she thought she'd try something different.

Her favorite massage therapist is also a Reiki master. So she gave the gentle, hands-on healing technique a try.

"It was very different and it was as relaxing as a regular massage, says Gerard, of Appleton, who works a high-stress sales job. "It's more of an energy massage. It's about opening yourself to divine energy. It's very spiritual."

While a physical massage relaxes sore muscles, Reiki relaxes her entire being, she added.

"I get so relaxed and I am in a state best described as right before you fall asleep ... and your mind is free," said Gerard, who now gets regular Reiki sessions.

Reiki (pronounced ray-kee) is an ancient Japanese healing art that involves the "laying of hands" on the body. It's based on the belief that a "life-force energy" exists within us and all around us. A Reiki practitioner serves as a conduit, channeling the energy into people who need it, those who are drained physically, emotionally or spiritually.

In addition to being incredibly peaceful, Reiki can also heal, says Wendi Hermsen, a massage therapist and Reiki master at Appleton's Superior Massage & Wellness Center.

"When that energy gets depleted, we get sick, develop illnesses or feel stress," said Hermsen, who works on Gerard. "Reiki can help us increase this universal life force within us to keep us healthy and aid in the healing of our imbalances."

Hermsen received her massage training at the Fox Valley School of Massage, but learned Reiki from local master teachers. A Reiki master is someone who has attained at least "level three," one of the highest levels of "attunement," which is the ability to tap into and channel the energy.

While some skeptics dismiss Reiki as nothing more than the placebo effect, the federal government is investing several million dollars into clinical trials. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine is sponsoring several studies to examine Reiki's potential healing effects on stress, fibromyalgia, prostate cancer and patients with advanced AIDS.

Everyone has the ability to do Reiki once they take a class, says master teacher Susan Cossette of Appleton, who was one of Hermsen's teachers. Teaching Reiki also involves an "attunement" process, which cleanses and balances the chakras and opens the body to channel Reiki.

Many alternative healing disciplines believe the body contains seven major chakras, a series of energy centers throughout the body that conduct the life-force energy.

"You can compare our bodies to a radio," Cossette said. "In order to hear those radio signals, we need to tune ourselves in and turn ourselves on. And the attunement is what turns us on

to universal life-force energy."

Practicing Reiki, along with other healing arts, has become a full-time job for Cossette, who owns and operates her business, Health and Healing Zone, out of her home.

Like many Reiki practitioners, Cossette was drawn to the discipline by her own healing experience.

About a decade ago, Cossette left her corporate banking job following a work-related injury. A stack of chairs fell on her and injured her neck, leaving her with debilitating migraines. She sought out chiropractic care and massage therapy to manage her pain. Inspired by her experience, she decided to go back to school for massage therapy.

In one of her classes, a fellow student offered to do a Reiki session on her.

"That's when I finally felt relief," she said. "After that, I didn't have any more pain from the injury."

Now eight years later, Cossette averages four to five Reiki sessions a day, and teaches Reiki to hundreds of people in the Fox Valley.

It's becoming increasingly mainstream, she said. She guesses there are at least 4,000 Reiki practitioners in the region, and several hundred who offer their services to the public.

Judy Phillips, who teaches Reiki at The Tea Leaves Shoppe in Appleton, agrees.

"It's definitely growing and more and more people are becoming interested in it," said Phillips, of Pulaski, who has found relief from back pain and fibromyalgia by practicing Reiki.

While Reiki is a spiritual practice, it's not a religion, nor does it conflict with Christianity or other religions, Phillips said.

"I look at Reiki as being like a prayer," she said. "You pray for something in particular for that person."

"There are a lot of nuns who are becoming attuned and healing touch is becoming popular in hospitals."

Cossette said she has trained many local health care practitioners.

"A lot of my students are nurses and they are administering Reiki pre-op and post-op," she said. "And I have gone into the hospitals and worked on my clients after surgery."

You don't have to be a "believer" to benefit from Reiki, but the results are more dramatic if you are open to it, Cossette said.

Hermsen said she has introduced many of her massage clients to Reiki, which then often becomes their preferred treatment.

"Reiki is my passion," she said. "While massage will do the muscle manipulation, Reiki will affect more of the cause of the muscle tension. Reiki brings massage to a whole other level when you can combine the two."

Wendy Harris is a reporter for the Appleton Post-Crescent.

For more info, to Schedule an Appointment, or to learn Reiki, please contact:

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