

Not Just For Mermaids

Brunswick Residents Find Water Aerobics A Fitting Workout

BY LYNN CARLSON

They love the smell of chlorine in the morning; it smells like fitness. On this blistering Friday, a dozen women of a certain age gather, eager for their twice-weekly dose of torture at the hands of the taut-toned gal in the high-thigh swimsuit.

"Look down at your stomach or feet, whichever comes first," a grinning Liz Hanke yells to the ladies in the pool. The cheery Spring music from Vivaldi's "Four Seasons"—with a throbbing backbeat added as an exercise metronome—flows from a boom box in the corner. Under Hanke's guidance, these 12 will spend the next full hour jogging, hopping, twisting, kicking and simulating the movements of cross-country skiing—all under water.

It's a workout that would exhaust many people half their age. But in the water, the body has only a fraction of its on-land heft; buoyant arms and legs flex more easily, with virtually the same cardiovascular benefits as running and jumping on land. And exercisers stay cool and comfortable while getting more beneficial resistance from water than they would from air.

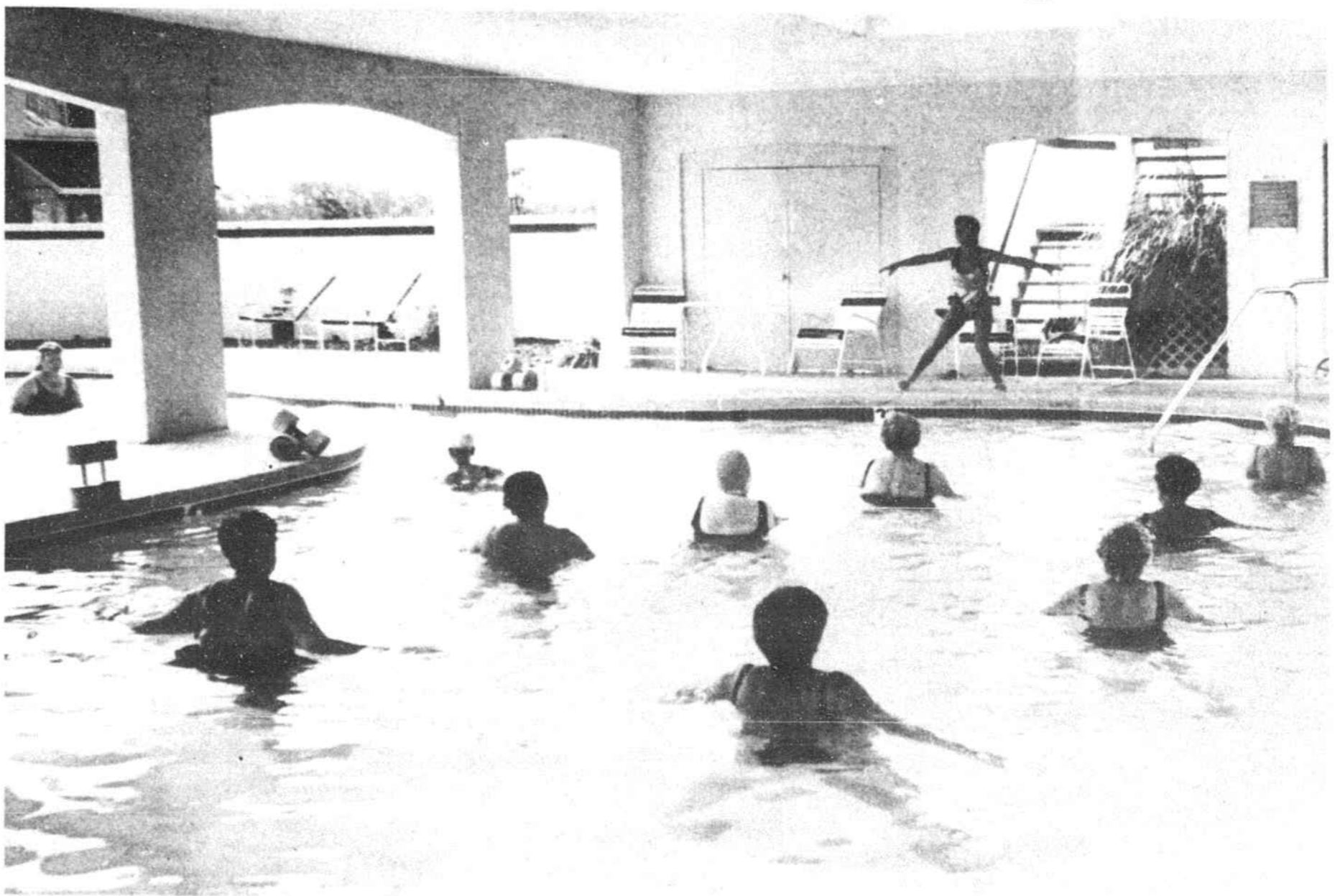
This is pool aerobics, a kind of workout many find just right for climes such as Brunswick in summertime. Perfect, too, for a population which includes lots of men and women who thought they'd never again feel like Esther Williams or Johnny Weismuller.

This group works out at the Marsh Harbour Marina clubhouse pool in Calabash; the resort sponsors the program year-round for non-owners as well as owners. A little further north, the Brunswick County Parks and Recreation Department holds day and evening water aerobics classes in the pools of Lockwood Folly Golf Links, St. James Plantation and the N.C. Baptist Assembly at Fort Caswell. Elsewhere in the county, condominium developments and resorts are conducting private water aerobics classes for their residents and visitors.

Instructor Hanke sees no mystery in the the popularity of this sport. "Water aerobics can lower blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol and make arthritis better—not to mention that it does great things for your attitude," she explains as her students go through their routine. The backdrop this day is soothing classical music; other days the exercisers sing while they work out to the music of the '40s and '50s. This day all the participants are women; but when men show up, they're welcomed.

While the Calabash group is comprised mostly of women of retirement age, the Rec Department's evening classes attract a number of working people who find the water workout to be a great stress-reducer—one that leaves them feeling refreshed and exhilarated rather than punished and depleted.

"We've had a great turnout this year," said Emma T. McGraw, coordinator of the county's program. "We've been offering water aerobics for four summers, first just at the Baptist Assembly. Last year we added St. James and this year, Lockwood Folly."



INSTRUCTOR LIZ HANKE leads one of several Brunswick County water aerobics groups through an hour-long workout.

STAFF PHOTO BY LYNN CARLSON

McGraw said from 25 to 31 participants per session have attended evening workouts at Lockwood Folly. "Overall, in all the classes, the majority are senior citizens who haven't been as active in recent years as they'd like. We have several who have had knee injuries, because this is a rehab-type exercise. The water absorbs shock, makes it low-impact."

Not to say that it's less of a workout, though. "Water walking for 30 minutes is like two hours of land-walking," because of the water's resistance, McGraw added.

Water aerobics participant Jacqueline Phillips is a true believer. The Buccaneer Hills retiree says the classes are a great place to meet new friends—always important to retirees—as well as a way to do something good for yourself. "It's not only good exercise, but you get to know and care about a lot of really nice people. Plus, we can look at our instructor and dream about what we used to look like!" she adds.

Phillips thinks Brunswick County needs a public indoor pool where schoolchildren can be taught swimming and where adults can swim laps and take water

exercise classes. "If I'd won the Powerball lottery, I'd have bought us one," she jokes.

In the Calabash class, the women pause after a half hour to take their pulses. "We're all alive and well," someone yells from the water. Heart rates are compared; congratulations are shared.

The workout continues and intensifies in its second half-hour. "This one's for your buns of steel!" Hanke shouts.

Comes a retort from the water. It's Phillips: "YOUR buns of steel..."

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