

15 MINUTES

Florida student considers the artistry of massage

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A small group of future massage therapists enjoyed lunch outside on a mild December afternoon. They congregated around benches next to their school, the Academy of Massage and Skin Care in South Fort Myers.

Student Rose Giro, 58, talked about her enthusiasm for health and well-being, massage therapy and how a therapist's hands may be like brushes for a painter or letters for a writer.

"I think that massage is an art," she said. "It's not about just the mechanics of joints and muscles. What's interesting about massage is everyone brings a different background and everybody develops such a unique touch in their work."

Ms. Giro to the massage table a lifetime of experience: a Midwestern childhood, traveling across the country, becoming a vegetarian, and an appreciation of her favorite artists, such as Claude Monet.

"I'm in what you might call the leading edge of the baby boomers," she said. "I think one of the reasons they've aged so well is they take care of themselves, and I think massage is one of those avenues that can lead to a better physical lifestyle."

In the mid-1970s, she became a vegetarian, and has aged elegantly, proof that she might be right about the choice. She had brought a zip-lock bag containing a healthy lunch to the massage school.

"I have dehydrated bananas, pecans, walnuts and a whole-grain cereal that

makes up a quick trail mix," she said. "At home, I'd probably have something hot, but still with fruits, vegetables and whole grains."

Ms. Giro grew up in the country outside Independence, Mo., the birthplace of President Harry S. Truman.

"I would describe it as quiet, rural, family and friend oriented," she said. "A hard-working and fun-loving community."

Later, she lived near Kansas City, Mo., where she was a volunteer speaker at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Ms. Giro gave presentations to civic and business groups about the museum, with its cathedral-like cafeteria and a huge lawn dotted with oversized pop-art birdies. It also boasts one of the largest collections of ancient Chinese art in the world.

Some of Ms. Giro's favorite artists are the local unknowns she sees in galleries like Space 39 or Arts for ACT in downtown Fort Myers.

"I appreciate local artists," she added. "I guess it's the expression of the inner self that I connect with. You sometimes connect with the pieces from certain artists whether international or local."

Ms. Giro moved to Fort Myers in 2004, after spending the previous six years traveling across the United States and Canada in a motor home with her significant other. Before leaving, they took a class on how to live on the road, the best way to get mail and finding a place to vote. They learned that about 1 million RVs were on the road full time when they first departed, in 1998.



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Rose Giro, student at Florida Academy of Massage and Skin Care

"We did have cell phones, but Internet services were problematic when we started," said Ms. Giro, adding that most RV campgrounds have wireless Internet connections now.

During this sabbatical, the couple stopped near Fort Myers more than once. They fell in love with the sub-tropic winters of mild breezes and swaying palm trees, among other places.

"We still didn't see everything, even after six years," Ms. Giro said. "Our goal was to see those places we had read about

that appealed to us, that other travelers had told us about. The coast of Oregon was very high up on my list."

She added, "It's just a spectacular coastline. It's rugged. It's gorgeous. The air feels good."

Now that Ms. Giro lives in Fort Myers, she plans on staying.

"The gypsy (in me) might take over at some point, but I've been happy in Florida," she said.

She is also a member of a senior tap-dancing group in Fort Myers, and is active on the social committee of Pelican Preserve. She was on the local 2007 United States Tennis Association team, which qualified for state competition in the adult/senior division.

On Jan. 7, she will graduate from the Academy of Massage and Skin Care along with six other students, prepared to get national certification. How will all her life experiences translate into her own unique style of massage? She's not sure, exactly. But it will help her clients feel better.

"I want to help people in pain," she said. "Massage relieves pain and anxiety, and extends the years of physical activity. It improves your mood. It could be a first option before prescriptions or surgery."

It also inspires Ms. Giro, who is learning more about nutrition and anatomy in her massage class.

"I find that massage and the body is endlessly fascinating," she said. "(The body) is this marvelous vehicle that we live." ■



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