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Walk the walk

Improve your health physically and mentally one step at a time

By G. Labate

XERCISE, FOR MANY of us, does not come as naturally as we would like. It's just one more up-hill battle that requires constant maintenance, as Sisyphean as laundry and dishes, especially after a long day at work. For all of us that add 'get in shape' or 'take up running' or 'go to the gym' to our lists of New Year's resolutions, there are few among us that are able to commit to exercise beyond maybe a month of attempts before our lofty hopes fade into the background, a soft tv-static buzz of 'oh, yeah... I meant to do that'. However, even though it might feel like it, it's never too late to start. You don't have to be







PHOTOS BY GENIA WICKWIRE

Above, Poet's Walk in Red Hook; above left, the Nyquist-Harcourt Wildlife Sanctuary in New Paltz; below left, Black Creek in Port Ewen.

a shining beacon of health and wellness to perform this particular relatively simple exercise that can genuinely help improve both your physical and mental health, in fact, this activity comes so naturally that the vast majority of us have been doing it in short bursts since before the age of one: walking.

Now, you may be thinking: Really? *Walking?* How beneficial can that really be? How much healthier can walking actually make me? You may be surprised. Walking regularly, even for one 30 minute interval a day improves your

cardiovascular and pulmonary health, strengthens your bones and leg muscles, and reduces body fat. It reduces the risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type two diabetes. Additionally, stud-

ies done by Harvard Health Publishing have found that longer walks, up to an hour a day, reduce the risk of developing breast cancer and strengthen the immune system. The mental health benefits of walking regularly are significant as well. Walking regularly can improve sleep, help deal with everyday tensions and stress, and decrease the effects of conditions





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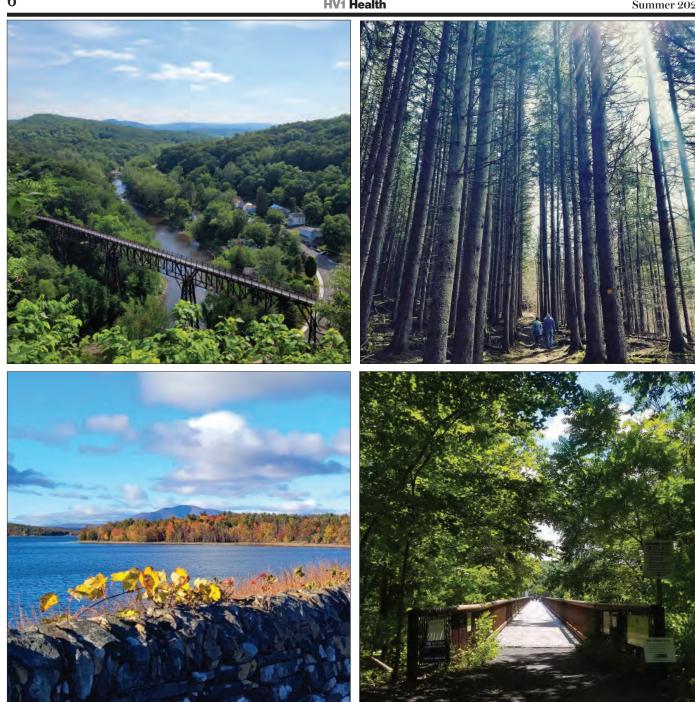
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Clockwise from top left: walking up Joppenburgh Mountain to see the Rosendale Tressle below; walking with a companion; the Rosendale Tressle; Zena cornfield; the Ashokan Rail Trail.

like anxiety and depression. It may be tempting to give in to exhaustion and malaise after a long day of work but the release of endorphins created during exercise will genuinely make you less tired and help to prevent the restlessness and mental fog that come with getting home and collapsing directly onto the couch.

Thirty minute walks once a day is the generally accepted point to shoot for, but even so, this can be broken up into two 15 minute walks or three 10 minute walks. While some people swear by walking with a pedometer and always trying to shoot for 10,000 steps a day, those new to regular exercise may want to keep in mind that it isn't like trying to score points in a game. Starting small is still starting. Walking for periods of time and/or distances that are comfortable and then working up to longer times and distances without putting unnecessary pressure on yourself may





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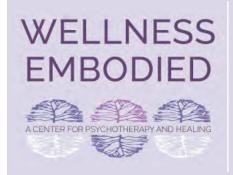




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In neighborhoods and more urban areas, walking right out your door may be the best choice for you, whether you have a set destination or not. It may be a matter of taking a longer route to work or to a cafe, maybe taking the additional 15 minutes to walk to somewhere you might normally drive to.

There are also miles and miles of forested trails, parks, and nature preserves all of varying lengths and topographies scattered throughout the Hudson Valley. With so many to pick from there is sure to be one only a short drive from you. Check out the Hudson Valley Rail Trail which includes the Walkway over the Hudson, the River-to-Ridge Trail in New Paltz,

Walking regularly can improve sleep, help deal with everyday tensions and stress, and decrease the effects of conditions like anxiety and depression.

the Brickyard Trail in Kingston, Ashokan Rail Trail in West Hurley and Poet's Walk in Red Hook. There are nature preserves like Black Creek, Mohonk Preserve, Woodstock Land Conservancy trails and Minnewaska State Park, to name a few.

......

When it is too cold or too hot, consider walking in the now empty Hudson Valley Mall. It is heated in the winter and air conditioned in the summer. It is quiet and carpeted. You will see other people there regularly doing their rounds. You might as well do something in that empty space!

Plenty of people highly recommend walking as a social activity. It may be as simple as asking a friend to come along on a stroll with you. However, going on a daily walk can also be an opportunity to make a phone call you've been meaning to make. It might be a way to maintain your social life as well as your health. Engaging with others can be a great way to distract you from any initial discomfort that comes with the effort of being more active. It might even help you to

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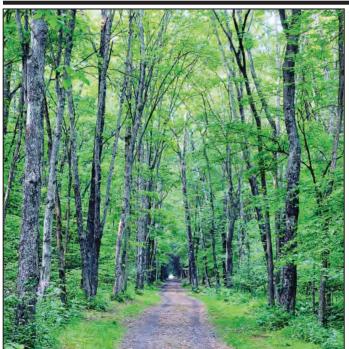


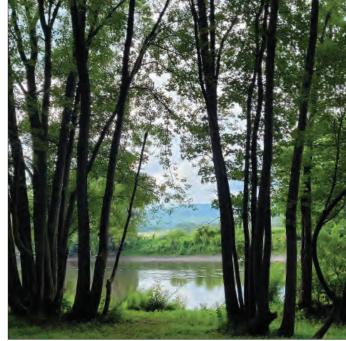
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Left, the rail trail in Stone Ridge; right, the rail trail beside the Wallkill River.

go further than you thought possible.

If you don't have someone who will walk with you there are plenty of forums and communities online that serve as places to connect with people of all paces and experience levels. Hudson Valley Relaxed Pace Hikers, Walkers on Meetup.com and the Hiking the Hudson Valley Facebook group are full of people looking to meet up and take a walk. Check your local community centers and libraries, such as Stone Ridge Library, Poughkeepsie Library, Hurley Library and more (make sure to double-check the times and locations as these groups constantly change.) Walking may be a new aspect that you introduce to your life, but that doesn't mean you have to take it on alone.

If a long day at work surrounded by coworkers only is weighing on you, a walk can also be the perfect chance to get some well-deserved time to yourself rather than a social interaction. Walking while alone in nature can be considered a form of meditation and a way to get some peace and quiet.

If quiet isn't your thing but being alone is, a walk can be made easier and more pleasant by bringing along your headphones or earbuds. Turn your music up. Find an interesting audiobook or podcast. Those can even help determine the distances of your walks. For example, walk the entire time an episode of a

podcast plays. Turn back at the end of the episode and walk back while the next episode plays. Two episodes down and your walk has been completed!

Doing something positive for yourself doesn't always need to be something that we grit our teeth and muscle through. Start small, don't hold yourself to exact standards and treat yourself a little more gently. Multitask your walk by adding in something you enjoy. Talk to friends or make new friends. Find a quiet moment or listen to music and podcasts. Whatever will make your walk seem less like a chore will help you to stick with it and become healthier both mentally and physically.





Left, the trail to the Saugerties lighthouse; right, the Rail Trail in New Paltz.



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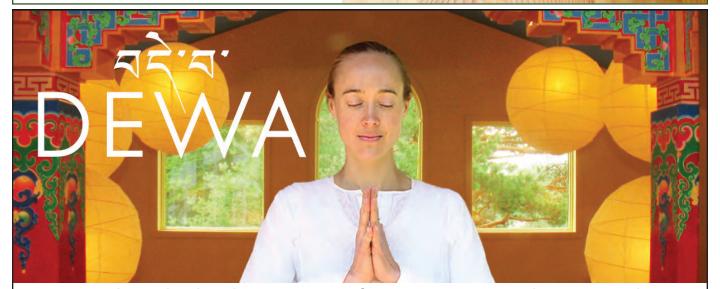
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Millie feeling good as she finishing up her 14 miles on the exercise bike

PHOTOS BY PHYLLIS McCABE

Working out at any age

Dick and Mildred Davis's ritual of workouts is thriving into their ninth decade

By Susan Demark

ICK DAVIS HAS a twinkle in his eye when he says, with relish, of his wife Mildred, "She's my sidekick. She's a superwoman." For decades, Mildred Davis

has not only been his constant companion but his gym partner, a commitment and ritual that have been important parts of their marriage and sustained their well-being. The commitment to staying so active remains in the ninth decade of their lives.



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Conversations with Richard "Dick" and Mildred reflect what they hold dear – family, faith, memories of travel, especially to Ireland (the place of Mildred's roots), and their lifelong love of physical activity and sports. Dick cites several places where he and Mildred have lived – Lake Katrine, Hyde Park, and other spots in the Hudson Valley, and Wilmington, North Carolina. No matter where they have lived, the gym and recreation facilities have been their go-to places.

From the time Mildred married Dick in 1961, after she migrated from Ireland in 1960, to now, the two have shared a mantra: "We just keep moving all the





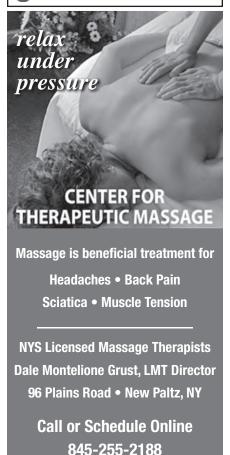
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Richard Davis on the abdominal crunch machine at Planet Fitness.

time," Dick says. This refers to the various homes and places they have lived. It also describes their lifelong embrace of exercise and sports.

Moreover, they have not let up. As Dick turns 89 this year and Mildred 87, they keep up the steady dedication to exercise that they possess and have shared for more than six decades.

As each has done their whole lives, they still do vigorous exercise. These days, the couple goes three times a week to the Planet Fitness gym in Kingston. The gym time has been their regular routine, and "it has been that way for years," according to Dick. "I mix it up," Dick explains

Hudson Valley Health

Summer 2025

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of his exercise approach. His routine can include doing weights, leg lifts, and cardio for about an hour-and-a-half. "I'm the oldest guy in the gym," he observes with a smile. He also works out at home.

For Mildred Davis, exercise at the gym and sports have been integral for a long time. "I've done the gym my whole life," she says, with pride. At Planet Fitness these days, she does the exercise bicycles and weights.



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For both Davises, their gym visits are important and provide much pleasure, something they wouldn't think of doing without. "I like the whole thing," he says, "You could spend your day in the gym."

The enthusiasm comes naturally to the Davises from nurturing this passion all their lives. Dick worked at IBM in Poughkeepsie and Kingston for 36 years, until 1991, in a variety of jobs related to



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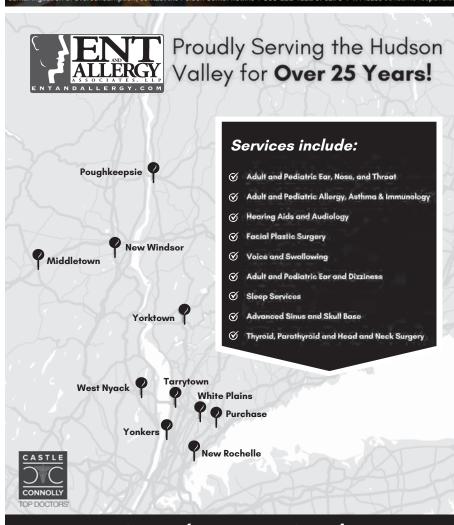
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production and manufacturing. The job enabled him to work out at the country club that included a full gym, recreational facilities, swimming pools, bowling alleys, tennis courts, and much more. Dick and Mildred took full advantage. He also was an avid bicyclist; regularly played softball and bowled; and loves to swim.

Mildred has loved and played various sports, particularly many types of racquet



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sports - "you name it, I have played it," she says, listing tennis, racquetball, table tennis, handball and indoor badminton (played indoors in Ireland and elsewhere on a high competitive level). Their home contains trophies from her competing and winning. She enjoyed the fast pace of these sports. In addition to her playing racquet sports of all kinds, Mildred regularly biked 125 miles a week. She recalls how she would start in Hyde Park, and bike over to New Paltz and up the Shawangunk Ridge to Minnewaska State Park, and then back to Poughkeepsie. She still logs some 12 to 14 miles on the bicycle during a gym visit.

As Dick and Mildred talk, they exhibit a deft volley of another kind, the verbal back-and-forth of a couple together since



Dick on the rope pull machine.

the early 1960s. Mildred emigrated in 1960 from Northern Ireland. Her family came from Kilkeel, a fishing village on the Irish seacoast. She was one of 10 children. Dick, of Welsh background, grew up in Watertown, N.Y., one of five children.

"I came to this country, and I didn't know anything," Mildred recalls. She worked as a waitress for many years. Dick, who met her in 1961, a year after she came to the U.S., concurs about how unknown the United States was to Mildred, saying, "She was as green as can be." The two take delight in telling the stories of just how new things were to Mildred. When a customer ordered a shrimp cocktail, Mildred went to the

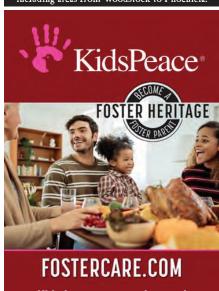
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Millie, age 87, doing 14 miles on the exercise bike at Planet Fitness.



restaurant's bar to ask for it, thinking it was a drink. When another customer asked for a screwdriver, Mildred said she was puzzled: "What on earth did he want with a screwdriver in a restaurant?" She did not know what a pizza was, nor was she eager to eat a slice of it then.

They married in November of 1961. The couple was keenly aware of the difficulties and violence between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland during the time of Mildred moving here - and of changes to the region over time. "When we were dating, if I had been a Catholic, she couldn't have dated me," says Dick of that era. "I was raised a Methodist." He remembers a time when the two were in Northern Ireland, and someone blew up a bus in the vicinity, saying, "It felt like an earthquake." Finally, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland negotiated the Good Friday Agreement, signed in 1998, that brought an end to decades of conflict known as the Troubles.

No matter whether they were home or abroad, the Davises kept up their physical activities. When they talk of their visits to Kilkeel over the years to visit family, for instance, the Davises describe an excellent gym located there. The Kilkeel Leisure Centre has a heated swimming pool, where Dick swam daily. It features a moving floor that allows its swimming depth to be adjusted.

While they appreciate the stories of their past, their roots, and their experiences, the Davises are very anchored in the present and appreciate each day. "Life is so good. We have a wonderful family," Mildred says with a smile. "They enjoy being together with their son and daughter, and their spouses, and grandchildren. Their rituals are simple after the gym. They go to Starbucks where Dick reads the *New York Post* and Mildred does sudoku. "I read the newspaper every day," he says. "You're never too old to learn."

Their commitment to both physical and mental activity remains very strong and intentional. "Some people figure that at a certain age, they're going to sit," Mildred says, adding later, "Age is a state of mind. You can be old if you want to be."

Each sees nothing grand in their gym routines and commitment to active lives. However it is central to who they are and what they share. As Dick says, "You just keep moving forward."

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PHOTOS BY VIOLET SNOV

by Violet Snow

NAMILD July morning, riders in immaculate breeches and jackets guide horses with braided manes across the grass between a warm-up ring and a show ring. Families sit in chairs facing the show ring, while a cluster of horses and riders wait at the entrance gate for the Open English Equitation class to begin.

Over a loudspeaker come the results of the previous class, Novice English Road Hack. Ribbons are handed out to the contestants in the arena before they file out. Western classes will be held in the afternoon, featuring horses in tooled-leather saddles, with riders in spangled or fringed shirts.

Unlike at higher-level shows such as the HITS jumping circuit arena in Saugerties, or even the local county fairs, the atmosphere here at the Woodstock Riding Club (WRC) is relaxed. "It's a low-pressure show for starting out with



a young horse or a beginning rider," says Chrissy Rider of Olivebridge, leading a slender yearling filly, who's hopping sideways at the end of the lead rope. "She's a little overstimulated," says her owner, wiggling the rope to get the little palomino's attention.

Chrissy's daughter, Jasmine, rides up on a handsome bay horse that accompanied her to college. Now at the end of her sophomore year, she is enjoying being back at the showgrounds just outside of Woodstock where she competed as a child.

"Do those bell boots work for you?" Linda Neu, the club secretary, asks Jasmine, pointing to the rubber rings encircling each of the bay's feet. "Oh, yes, they keep him from throwing his shoes," says Jasmine. Neu's horse Splash lost a shoe recently, and Linda is happy to get information from other horse owners on how to keep the shoes on his feet.

10-year-old Rose Hoffstatter of Hurley, having a great time riding Splash.

Annie, the daughter of club president Ralph Van Kleeck, ambles over on Dudley Do-Right, the chestnut gelding she's had for 10 years. While Annie is now 23 and enjoys competing at other local shows, she loves returning to the WRC. "It's the perfect family-friendly atmosphere," she explains. "This is the place to come for a relaxing day where the goal is to have fun with horses. Dudley loves it here. It's his second home."

Like many club members, Annie, who lives in Shokan, has often trailered her horse to the property to ride him in the grassy arenas, ideal for horse owners whose land does not have large spaces for riding. The grass footing is preferred by many riders to the dirt and sand floors of most show rings. There's even a riding trail laid out through the woods and an obstacle course, which is part of some of the show classes.

Scott Booth walks up to greet his good friend Dudley, leaning his forehead against the horse's muzzle. Scott's mother, Jane, is the club treasurer. For years Jane was Annie's riding instructor at the Booth property in Shandaken. Her only current student, 10-year-old Alyssa Heick, will be riding this afternoon in the Western walk-trot classes.

Although he is no longer riding, Scott fondly recalls that in his younger years, "This was home base for me. It was nice to compete and do well. And if a horse acts up here, it's not the end of the world. You can use it as a teachable moment." For a horse living with just one or two other equines, the shows provide an education in adapting to more activity, while young riders get used to being around their peers. Scott remembers forming a bond with a boy at his level, with a friendly rivalry developing between the two of them.

The Woodstock Riding Club was formed in 1947, when a group of local horse owners gathered to share their love of horses. They began by scheduling square dances and a late spring trail ride. About 20 riders and horses braved mud and cold, followed by lunch at the Calico Ranch in Lake Hill.

By October 1947, the WRC was incorporated, with a membership of 83. They began to organize horse shows and joined the American Horse Shows Association. In 1949, the club was offered an option on the tract of land at the base of Ohayo Mountain. Members each pledged several





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Scott Booth greets his good friend Dudley-Do-Right, ridden by Annie Ralph VanKleeck.

hundred dollars to purchase the land, and they built the barns that are still on the grounds, so competitors could have the option of renting stalls during shows. When Native American activists were riding their horses across the continent in the early 2000s, they stabled their mounts at the WRC for a stopover of a few days.

Over the years, the WRC has hosted about four horse shows each season, as well as clinics and special events. Each October, a Fall Fun Festival includes the usual equitation classes as well as games such as an egg-and-spoon race and a toilet paper race, in which two horses move side by side, while their riders try not to break the strip of toilet paper held between them.

Riders of all ages are welcome to compete in the shows, which are judged by a professional judge. A full roster of 60 or so classes covers different levels of ability, as well



Jasmine and yearling.



Alyssa on Finnegan.

as jumping and driving. Fitting and Showmanship classes take place with the handlers on the ground, leading the horses into the ring and lining them up before the judge, as Chrissy does at the July show with her yearling, competing against Alyssa and 10-year-old Rose Hoffstatter of Hurley. Alyssa and Rose go on to ride in several Western walk-trot classes, in which they take turns winning the blue first-place ribbons. "She loves it here," says Rose's mother, Jen. "She loves the competitiveness, and she loves doing things with her horse. It's a safe and nonstressful event. It's good place to learn."

For more information on the WoodstockRiding Club, or to become a member, visit https://woodstockridingclub.comorcall Ralph VanKleeck at (845) 464-4240 or Linda Neu at 845-750-0467.



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