

Tools that transform

Massage therapist and wellness coach opens practice in town

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Jill DeMasi was enjoying a successful career as a human resources professional, including recruiting, employee relations, benefits administration and administering wellness programs. Then a back injury changed the way she looked at the world.

"I had chronic pain for seven or eight years. I couldn't work for a little while," said DeMasi, who ultimately found relief with chiropractic care and massage therapy.

She also found a new career.

"I was inspired to go to school for the specific therapy I practice now. There's always a reason for everything, even if you don't know what it is," said DeMasi.

"It totally changed my life. Being in pain was difficult, but it definitely helped me find my purpose, so here I am," she said of her gradual decision to change careers.

"It happened over time. I was very inspired by the people I was working with, my massage therapist, my chiropractor. They were very positive people," she added.

"I started to align myself with them and their beliefs. At the time, I didn't feel good. I was depressed, I

was in pain."

DeMasi, who is a licensed massage therapist, certified whole health educator and wellness coach, recently moved her practice, The Heart of Wellness, to Rocky Hill from Glastonbury.

"I never thought I'd be doing this. I was an office person," she said.

A graduate of the Connecticut Center for Massage Therapy in Newington and a member of the American Massage Therapy Association, her training is in integrated structural therapy.

That consists of craniosacral therapy, myofascial therapy, positional release and visceral manipulation. She also offers orthopedic, sports, Swedish and pregnancy massage.

She worked for other practices before opening her own business in Glastonbury about five years ago, sharing space with a friend.

"I decided I really wanted to have my own space," she said of her decision to move to Rocky Hill, where she also lives. "It's nice to be close to home."

The practice opened Sept. 1 on Old Main Street. DeMasi called



Photos by Mara Dresner

Jill DeMasi chose a career in the healing arts after working in human resources for many years.

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integrated massage is a holistic approach.

"What you're doing is looking at the whole person. You're not just looking at one body part to fix it. Our body is integrated, head to toe, with connective tissues," she said.

"If someone has pain in their shoulder, what else is out of balance that could be related to this pain? It's really just an integrated approach, looking at the whole person and not just specific body parts," she added.

"I enjoy helping people get through pain. My favorite thing to do is help people get through chronic pain and manage that stress. I know what it's like. It's pretty miserable when you're not feeling well and can't do the things you want to do, whether it's work or your favorite activity."

Donna Hires started seeing DeMasi while being treated for two frozen shoulders after a bad fall on an icy driveway two winters ago.

"I was in terrible pain and had very low range of motion in my arms.

My husband had to help me get dressed every morning. I couldn't sleep well because the pain was so bad at night," she said.

"My orthopedist sent me for physical therapy and told me to try therapeutic massage as well. When I started with Jill, I could not raise my arm five inches away from the side of my body. After about a year of

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-Jill DeMasi

monthly massages, I have complete range of motion and am back to playing golf several times a week," said Hires.

"I have never been a person who goes to spas and I am not an overly self-indulgent person, but I am now a firm believer that therapeutic massages are just as critical to my physical well-being as any other medical care," she added.

"Jill is an incredibly caring and thoughtful person. She is a highly skilled massage therapist and I know she worked very hard to get my body back to where it was. I think Jill is so wonderful that I now travel almost an hour and a half to see her."

Hires recently moved from Farmington to Westerly, R.I. DeMasi is also a graduate of

the National Institute of Whole Health, a program that focuses on five aspects of health (physical, emotional, nutritional, environmental and spiritual), and she offers private and small group health coaching sessions in person and online.

She is also a Qivana independent business owner and offers its exclusive health supplements and skin care line in her practice.

"I knew I wanted to start doing something else. I really coach when I'm doing massage. I really enjoy talking and educating about a healthy lifestyle and talking about stress," she said.

"It's what I've been doing all this time besides the hands-on work. I can't be doing massage until I'm 80. It's hard on your body."

She chose the program because of its in-depth nature.

"So many people call themselves health coaches. I didn't want just a few weeks or a weekend [program]. I wanted to do it right," she said.

"They only accepted people who had some sort of professional license. A lot of nurses go there part time. It's for anyone who wants to add on to their certification. Once I looked at their curriculum, it ties in so well with the type of massage I want to do."

She received her certification in the summer of 2014. DeMasi noted that many people just think of weight loss and exercise when they consider health coaching, which is only part of the picture.

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"We're looking at the physical body, including exercise, any conditions they have. We're looking at the emotions of it, your thoughts and how they affect your physical body. For every thought and emotion you have, there are physiological effects in your body," she said.

"Then there's the nutrition. For everything you consume, there are effects that are happening in the body. Then you have environmental issues, from stress at work to your home environment, mostly I think the pollution, the toxins and how they relate to obesity.

"It's not just about what you eat anymore. It's about the food supply and how it affects your physical and emotional health. They all build on each other. And then you have the spiritual, based on the connections we have with other people, how important relationships are with other people, with pets, the earth, whatever your higher power is, how important it is to be engaged," she added.

"Every course I took and everything that happened in school was based on those aspects."

DeMasi offers what she called a complimentary health discovery session.

"We talk on the phone or in person or online. We go over what their struggles are, what maybe I can help them with, and I'll recommend a program," she said. "I always meet the person where they're at."

One program is a 30-day Whole Health Education program.

"We go over the mind/body connection, chronic disease management, the body's adaptation to stress. That's more of a clinical type coaching," she said. "It's a clinically proven behavior change program."

Another is the 60-day Transform Your Habits Program.

"That's more of one-on-one coaching," she said. "It's really to help people to stay on track and educate them. It's not about telling people what to do. It's about helping them make informed decisions about their health."

There's also a 30-day Flip Your Habits do-it-yourself program, with the option to add in coaching. She's also working on adding more programs and educational tools. DeMasi will refer clients to other professionals as needed.

"I don't make up diets for people. I know plenty of dietitians, I know plenty of nutritionists, I know chiropractors, I know trainers," she said. "You can't do it by yourself."

She practices what she preaches when it comes to self care, going for massages every few weeks and working out three to four times per week.

"Working out definitely helps my stress management. I just try to live a healthy lifestyle as much as I can," she said.

In addition to her training and professional experience, DeMasi said her background offers her a unique perspective to her clients.

"I've struggled with my weight. I've had anxiety. I've had depression. I've had a lot of issues I've overcome," she said.

"I can relate to people in pain

and I can relate to what happens when you're in pain. There's usually some depression, some anxiety. I'm a good listener. If I can help someone, I'll tell them. If I can't, I'll tell them," she added.

"I've been through a lot of health practitioners who couldn't help me and it was a frustrating journey. I know what it's like not to be listened to by doctors, to feel you're never going to get better."

That's why she likes to look at the whole picture of who each client is.

"When someone comes in, I like to ask them about their life. I don't just say, 'You hurt your shoulder, let's go,'" she said.

"It's important to ask questions and to listen, to be the facilitator and the guide, and not do it for them, to give them the tools to transform their own health." **RHL**

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