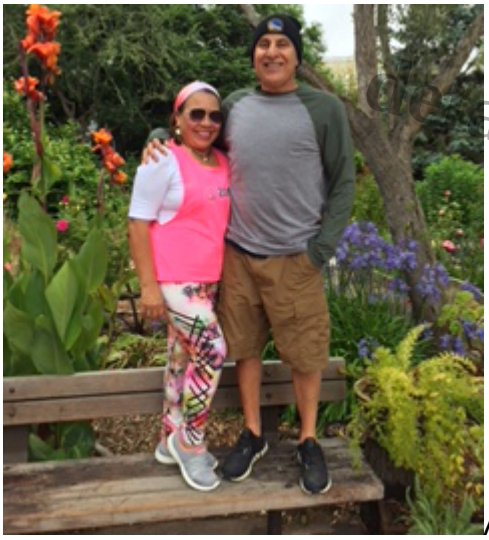


Love of exercise and volunteering leads couple to become team Zumba teachers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Ana Silvia and Irving Rivera, who met in an exercise class at City College, now teach Zumba at the 30th Street Senior Center. Married for 38 years, their love of exercise is matched only by their dedication volunteering.

Their volunteering started in their kidsâ?? schools, from kindergarten through high school. Now they teach the Zumba class as well as a Stanford-designed Healthy Living class. Mrs. Rivera also volunteers in the centerâ??s programs department, compiling volunteer statistics.

â??Giving back to the community is in our DNA,â?• she said.

The Riveraâ??s path to volunteering and exercise began where they met â?? at City College San Francisco in the 1970s. Both were taking exercise classes to fulfill requirements for their Associate Artsâ?? degrees. After their children went off to college in 2000, the Riveras returned to the school to take dancing, yoga and swimming classes.

â??How I got to love yoga was the result of stress on the job,â?• said Mrs. Rivera. â??When I changed jobs, I began to experience headaches. The doctor prescribed therapy and Vioxx.â?• She never took the pills, instead listening to her therapist, who said there was nothing wrong with her and advised yoga

for stress reduction.

Life was good for the Riveras as they became more proficient in many different Latin dances. â??I didnâ??t want to go at first,â?• said Mr. Rivera, 64, â??but Iâ??m glad Ana encouraged me because now I love to dance.â?•

Unfortunately, in 2007, their exercise life was interrupted by a motorcycle accident. â??I broke my right leg in three different places, and had to be in a wheelchair for eight months,â?• said Mrs. Rivera. â??The recovery was slow for the bones because they put eleven screws into my leg.â?•

A setback and brave stroke forward

In 2008, with the doctorâ??s green light to start exercising again, the Riveras went back to the pool for water aerobics. â??Because of the accident, when I got in the pool again, I became petrified of the deep water,â?• said Mrs. Rivera. â??I would cry, but little by little I became brave.â?•

This experience of overcoming her fear motivated both of them to help novice students experiencing fear in the deeper part of the pool. For the past 10 years, they have assisted the CCSF swimming teacher for beginning students.

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â??I counsel students who are afraid. I tell them about my accident, my fear and how I was able to overcome it,â?• said Mrs. Rivera.

As Mrs. Riveraâ??s interest in Latin dances expanded, so did her interest in Zumba. In 2010, she joined a class at the 3691 Fit Club on Mission Street. â??Zumba is fun because it keeps me strong, positive and helps me maintain my weight,â?• she said.

In 2016, after six years of taking Zumba classes, one of the staff members at the 30th Street Senior Center approached Mrs. Rivera about offering a Zumba class to the seniors. â??At first, I was excited to do it, but concerned about the responsibility of taking on a commitment of teaching once a week,â?• she said. â??But, the internal strength I felt from my yoga and stretching classes gave me confidence.â?•

A true team effort

Zumba, a fitness program developed in the 1990s by a Columbian dancer and choreographer named Beto, combines many Latin dances including: Cumbia, Merengue, Salsa, Cha Cha and Samba. â??I add Bachata and Rock and Roll just for fun,â?• said Mrs. Rivera, who holds a Zumba teaching certificate.

She and her husband â?? sheâ??s the main instructor with her husband as assistant â?? have been volunteer Zumba instructors at the 30th Street Senior Center for the past two and a half years.

â??Irving helps me in so many ways, his assistance is invaluable, I couldnâ??t do it without him,â?• said Mrs. Rivera. Her husband organizes the musical playlists from many different countries. In class, he welcomes students, ascertains whether they need a chair, makes sure they sign in, gets them their hand weights, turns on the fans, and carries the oversize big boom box they purchased just for the class.

â??Thereâ??s a lot of work that goes into orchestrating a successful Zumba class,â?• said Mrs. Rivera, who changes the class format each week, adding and subtracting dances to add color and make it more fun. â??I choreograph the movements to fit the playlist, making sure of the timing and including variety.â?•

The Riveras love Zumba because of its free spirit. â??We welcome everyone. We never correct movements. People dance to their own rhythm,â?• said Mrs. Rivera.

Their Zumba class is held from 10 to 11 a.m. Thursday mornings on the third floor at the 30th Street Senior Center. New students can drop-in or call the center at 415-550-2210 for information.

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