

Parkinson's students coping with 'knock-out fun'

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Often, the word "boxing" conjures up a whole barrage of imagery — some of it not so good for some people.

Then there's International Boxing Club founder and executive director Harry Cummins, who has started another new community program. This time, the IBC is helping people living and coping with Parkinson's disease.

Currently, there are 11 Parkinson's students enrolled in their "Knock-Out Parkinson's" class.

Enrolled is Craig Adams, 55, a Temperance, Michigan-based automation system architect, who's not only taking on his Parkinson's headlong with the gusto of a heavyweight champ, but he's poised to star in the IBC's annual Celebrity Boxing Night this coming September. Fellow students have agreed to walk out with him and stand in his corner.

Another student is 78-year-old Evelyn Brennan, who said the day she first walked into the cavernous gym off Starr Avenue for the somewhat-intimidating-at-first Parkinson's boxing program, was a bit inhibited. Just a few months in, she is engaging in conversations with other students and actually punching the bag, whereas she used to barely tap it.

Then there's 72-year-old Gil Bertstuber, who after losing 11 pounds, said, "I've been involved with the program maybe a couple of months. And to be honest with you, I thought it was kind of a silly idea at first, until I came over and watched them once. That's when I decided to try it, and it's so much fun. And, boy, do they work our tushes off. I'm exhausted and soaking wet when I walk out the doors.

"I like working the bag the most," Bertstuber continues, "because it allows you to expend a lot of energy, without moving around a whole lot. I've got arthritis in my knee and my shoulder, so it's nice for that. Everything you can do, as far as ex-



Craig Adams, 55, and Ed Cochrane, 82, who both suffer from Parkinson's Disease, work out together at the International Boxing Club. (Press photo by Ken Grosjean)

pending energy, and doing exercises, helps with the Parkinson's. My main thing is a tremor in my hand, and a little stiffness, and the program really helps.

"The hardest thing for me is getting up early for Monday morning class," Bertstuber laughs. "But, it's definitely worth it once I get here. It's just a great, fun program, full of a lot of great, nice people, and I definitely look forward to it every week."

Cummins and former University of Toledo occupational therapy grad student and 2007 Clay alumna Rachel Martinez launched the program in late spring following a weekend "training camp" at Rock Steady Boxing, Inc in Indianapolis, Indiana, which educated them on how to do so.

"I was really, really impressed with the training camp at Rock Steady Boxing," of-

PD is defined as a progressive disorder of the brain that can affect balance, coordination, walking and other everyday movements that we often take for granted.

"These people are fighting Parkinson's Disease," said Dr. Martinez. "They're fighting to maintain what they have. They're fighting for their happiness. They're fighting for their lives."

Thanks to the IBC's ongoing relationship with Dr. Beth Ann Hatkevich of the University of Toledo and Department of Rehabilitation Science chairwoman Dr. Michelle Masteron, the IBC has been able to secure workout partners for their students.

"The program has gone way beyond my expectations," said Martinez. "I chose to become an occupational therapist because I love to help people. I love to make a difference in peoples' lives. But, these students have made a difference in my life, too. It's really inspirational to me to see them participate in our program, because they just love the boxing."

"They love each other, too," she says. "They just hit it off right away, and I've been so impressed with their camaraderie. Everyone seems to be together in this fight. And, you know, they are fighting something, it's bigger than climbing into a ring, and fighting an opponent."

Cummins adds, "For me, it's been something to get up in the morning for. I've always tried to do things to help other people, but bringing these Parkinson's students in...it's just really motivated me to do more. I'm pumped to help these great people, and to help our program grow and grow."

"To me, it's been a real privilege. I'm thankful for Rachel and to Rachel for approaching me about the program. And, I'm thankful for all my new friends in our class. We've really become a team. We've really become a family. I couldn't feel more happy and blessed."

Log onto www.ibctoledo.org to find out more about their PD program, call 419-244-8955 to inquire about classes, or stop in at 525 Earlwood Ave.