



Laughing for the Health of It!

By Catherine McGarry Miller

The Healing Space on Main

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No, it's not a holistic comedy routine. It's what Beth Boeck does for the health of her clients at The Healing Space on Main in Menomonee Falls. The Healing Space is a cozy holistic health center run by practitioners who offer a variety of massage and spa treatments, chiropractic, stress management, counseling, gentle yoga, laughter yoga and other healing modalities.

Beth Boeck is a psychotherapist but “people are more comfortable with the term ‘counselor,’” she says. And Boeck is all about comfort and joy.

She started her career in wellbeing due to a traumatic family event: at 38, with two toddlers in tow, Boeck's husband had a near fatal heart attack. “I needed something to take care of us,” she recalls. So she went back to school to Mount Mary for a social work degree and continued at UW-Milwaukee for a masters degree within the child welfare program. At the same time she got her marriage and family therapy certificates. Her husband survived and her career in child welfare took off with a bang – a starting caseload of 100 children!

She and her partner hatched the idea of a healing space in Menomonee Falls. It took courage to launch a new business and they just prayed that, “if we built it, they would come. For this small business to survive for four years in this economy is pretty incredible,” Boeck related with pride.

Few of the practitioners take insurance, but all work on a sliding scale so they’ve not had to turn anyone away. Flexible spending programs, in which companies

set aside money for medical expenses that is deducted from paychecks tax-free, has been helpful to the practice, especially at the end of the year when employees have to use or lose those benefits. “We negotiate a rate that works for them,” she said.

It’s an intimate setting with a constellation of small offices and massage rooms. “When we were dreaming up The Healing Space, we knew we wanted to have classes.” Thus another door of opportunity opened for Boeck and she began to offer gentle yoga classes.

“I had taught senior classes including gentle yoga using a sturdy chair so floor poses are done sitting on a chair. The back of the chair helps them learn and relearn balance for standing positions.” Most of her clients, who range in age from 40 to 80, have never done yoga before. “It’s been a joy –there’s nothing like teaching people who never thought they could do something to learn how to do it!”

She continued offering counseling services and encountered a woman so depressed and anxious she said she hadn’t laughed in 5 years but was tired of taking medications. Boeck asked her to try something new. She uses a lot of relaxation techniques with her clients and started this client with deep abdominal breathing. Then she added a sound. From there, it was constructed laughter.

“People feel silly at first, so we did exercises and she came back after 3 weeks and said, ‘You know what? I laughed this week.’ We saw significant improvement in her depression without meds, so I knew this was something to use.”

Laughter Therapy is the brainchild of Dr. Madan Kataria, a physician from Mumbai, India. Beth explained, “He knew that laughter could be very healing and saw healthy people in a park and asked if they would come laugh with him. He started the first laughter club in 1995 which became an international movement.”

“A friend told me about it and I said, I have to learn that.” She Googled it on the internet and then went to an ashram in Virginia for a four-day training.

“I learned many techniques and walked away with so many tools! Over the past four years, people have found out that I do this and people ask to come to nursing homes and community centers. I’ve met a lot of wonderful people and we’ve had a lot of laughs together. Now, people will come up to me in the grocery store and just laugh and I’ll know that we’ve laughed together before.”

Before I left The Healing Space on Main, I did some gentle yoga with Beth (finding a way to do the Downward Dog without agonizing back pain) and then we formed a laughter circle with the women who were there. It was a bit awkward at first, constructing laughter, but soon it came naturally, as planned and I ho, ho, hoed my way back down the highway toward home.

