



Photo by Carolyn Morrisroe/staff

Amy Hargis and Robert Malone plan to offer a wide array of classes in their new Highlands studio.

# The wellness movement

## Practitioners in Highlands look at the big picture of health

By Carolyn Morrisroe  
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In the quest to achieve health and well-being, many people believe it's helpful to seek training, advice and care from a combination of fields.

Dr. Sue Aery has been providing chiropractic care and acupuncture in Highlands for more than nine years, and she sees the holistic approach as increasingly vital.

"I think the complete package of taking care of yourself is what we need to do more of," she said.

Aery works to educate people about what their options are in controlling their own health and how they can incorporate various facets in getting to their goal. In the interest of spreading the word, she gives free lectures and provides services to country clubs.

"A lot of the clubs are offering health and vitality programs to their members and they'll ask me to come in and be the wellness doctor piece because of my

knowledge base and because I can teach them how your body heals naturally," she said.

Aery embraces the idea that her patients benefit from working with experts in other fields.

"When it comes to healing, I like to engage other practitioners in those areas," she said. She pointed to yoga programs and classes at the Center for Life Enrichment on cooking healthy food as examples of local programs that are complementary to her practice.

The Wellness Place, which will have its grand opening on May 1, aims to become another resource for those seeking a healthy lifestyle.

Owners Amy Hargis and Robert Malone want the studio, located on Highway 106 across from Dusty's Rhodes Superette, to be a community space. The pair envisions the Wellness Place offering a wide array of classes and workshops, including yoga, qigong, meditation, martial arts and cooking.

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Photo by Carolyn Morrisroe/staff

Dr. Sue Aery combines chiropractic care, acupuncture and nutrition counseling in her practice in Highlands.

## Wellness

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### Adding variety to a fitness routine

Hargis and Malone encompass many areas of expertise. Malone is a chef, certified reiki practitioner, yoga teacher, teacher of sound meditation, and health minister for plant-based nutrition. Hargis has certifications in personal training, corrective exercise, senior fitness, yoga, meditation and plant-based nutrition, as well as degrees in ministry and counseling.

"He's going to teach a few yoga, qigong and meditation classes," Hargis said. "I even do martial arts training."

Another class in the lineup will be aerial, or antigravity, yoga, which utilizes a silk suspension system.

"What it essentially allows is, there are certain poses in yoga where gravity has an impact on how far you're able to get into the pose," Malone said. "It allows for the decompression of your spine in a more natural setting. It's almost like cradling a baby. There's a gentleness to that, rather than laying them on the ground."

Hargis said the aerial yoga courses will not require experience and that in the first year they will focus on the fundamentals in all their classes.

In order to offer all the disciplines they'd like, Hargis and Malone plan to bring in friends to help out.

"We have other people teaching most of the classes," Hargis said. "It's not our studio — we want it to be a community studio."

Hargis and Malone also want to keep classes small for more personal attention.

"I'm into small group training. I love small, intimate," Hargis said. "If it grows, fantastic, but we like to find a few people that are really into it and really work with them."

Understanding that the demographic in Highlands tends to skew to the older side, the Wellness Place plans to focus on the over-55 crowd.

"We want to cater especially to seniors," Hargis said. "I feel like they're very overlooked in the fitness world."

With the existing passions of Highlanders in mind, Malone said the center hopes to offer golf fitness instruction.

"We want to try to tie in, like in the movie 'The Legend of Bagger Vance,' yoga, meditation, physical training and golf," he said.

Aery agreed that meeting people where they are and supporting the activities they already enjoy is a great way to promote healthy habits.

"Everybody that comes here has some form of what they love to do because they're here, whether it's golf, tennis croquet, hiking, kayaking, biking, you name it. They all have their little niche," she said.



Photo by Carolyn Morrisroe/staff

The Wellness Place, slated to open May 1, provides chalkboards for others to post notices and events. Owners Amy Hargis and Robert Malone hope the studio becomes a community gathering space and shared resource.

Aery encourages her patients to engage in physical activities in whatever ways they are comfortable.

"If I can get somebody to work out with a trainer, or walk around the lake, or go get a dog at the Humane Society and walk because it will give them an excuse, or go to the yoga programs around here, it's wonderful," she said.

Aery said she welcomes a center such as Hargis and Malone have planned. She said she appreciates that they, like programs at the Recreation Centers in Highlands and Cashiers, are trying to pull people in to take care of themselves. She believes a wellness practitioner like herself can help connect all these endeavors in physical health.

"I love my work because I get to teach people all the time," Aery said. "I am a facilitator of healing. I don't fix people; I just help the body do what it's supposed to do."

### Setting children on the right path

Aery said today's younger generations are actually less healthy, in part because their parents weren't raised in healthy lifestyles and so don't know how to teach their kids better practices.

"It's very hard for us to control, but we can stop the trend," she said. "We can start to educate the younger generation and get them healthier so it doesn't just perpetuate itself."

Hargis and Malone also want to offer instruction and opportunities for children and teens.

"We'd like to do six scholarships for teens in high school who are interested in the health field. So they get to come for free each year," Hargis said.

The plan is to take three from Highlands School and three from Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School as a sort of mentorship.

"At the end we'll right a beautiful letter of recommendation for colleges," Hargis said.

Hargis looks forward to working with teens and kids on stress reduction. "Even if they don't stick to it now, a seed has been planted and so 30 or 20 years down the road when they come across it again they'll be able to sync right back into it again and make that connection," she said.

### Food as an ingredient in health

Tied into the idea of whole-body wellness is the importance of what you put in your body, and Hargis and Malone plan to cover that base, as well. At the back of the Wellness Place is a sizable kitchen area, where they want to offer a variety of services, including family cooking classes.

"It's getting the family back together," Hargis said. She operates on the principle that if you teach kids how to eat right, they'll often help their parents live more healthfully.

Malone said he has been a chef for 15 years and he wants to use that training plus his certification as a Hallelujah Acres health minister to complement the physical classes.

"The future goal is eventually we'll have it set up to where people can come have a class and then I provide a meal for them that supports the lifestyle we're trying to promote," Malone said. "We believe in a holistic approach to food as well."

Aery, who has a master's degree in nutrition, also sees food as an important piece of the health puzzle.

"I would love there to be more blending," she said. "More and more people are coming to me for nutrition, not only for weight loss but vitality, feeling better, having less fatigue."

When incorporating nutri-

tion education into her practice, Aery asks her patients to bring a partner, be it a spouse or a child, so they can learn about healthy food preparation together.

"A lot of families, because they're so disjointed, the kids are doing so many activities, there's very little time spent as a family unit, and I encourage my families to spend that time in the kitchen and have fun and make it enjoyable," she said.

For instance, she suggests parents have their kids prepare the salad and make it as colorful as they can, then talk about what they like to eat and how they can put it together. She encourages her patients to take the recipe books she has in her office and to look up recipes online. "Everybody likes to eat," she said, so it's just one more step to teach them how to create meals the family can enjoy together and expand their palates a little bit.

### Looking forward

Hargis and Malone hope to one day expand the Wellness Place into a more comprehensive wellness center, where visitors could stay in apartments in the building for weeks at a time.

Malone laid out a draft itinerary: "Someone comes up, they stay here, every morning they wake up, they train with Amy, I feed them throughout the day, we take them on nature hikes, we tune them back in with nature, they get adjustments from Dr. Sue (Aery), get bloodwork done from her, and then we'll do an evaluation of how they were when they started and how they were when they left," he said.

"Our goal is that hopefully within that 14 to 28 days there's been such a transition of their energy system that it's hard for them to go back into those old patterns," he added.

Aery has thought about cre-

ating a wellness center herself and thinks the space where Hargis and Malone are opening the Wellness Place has potential for such a project.

"That whole package that they're sensing, it's really close to nature and it's a got very good energy to it," she said.

Aery said a wellness center could be useful to residents and visitors to the area. She says that even people coming up just for a few months are often looking for a wellness network of information and services.

"People are very hungry for information, they just don't always know where to look for it," she said. "There's a lot of overlapping that's here, it's just a matter of perpetuating it."

Aery hopes that integrating the whole picture will help people's overall health.

"I think if people can achieve a higher level of health, whether they're taking medications or not, they're going to live longer and they're going to live a more active life," she said. "There's going to be more quality to their life."

The goal of all this education and her own practice is to lead people to the best lives possible, Aery said.

"If you're not living fully, one day to another, what's the point?" she said. "If you're hurting, get out of pain. If you're not healthy, get healthy. If you need to lose 40 pounds, lose 40 pounds, because you're going to live longer and you're not going to have to spend so much money on health care."

Malone said they want the Wellness Place to show people the choices they have available in their own health.

"We're not here to tell you what to do or how to do it specifically but we're here to expose you and say there's other options out there and you make up your own decision," he said. "If it's working for you and your body feels better, keep coming back."