

Devotion to exercise sets retirees apart from their parents

By Michelle Fay Cortez, BloombergBusiness

Bob Hemm, a 93-year-old retired chemical engineer, still drives his Mercury Milan and tutors fourth-graders in reading and math at a school near his home in Springfield, Va. Four years ago, at the cusp of 90, the widower remarried.

Where does all of his energy come from? Exercise, says Hemm, specifically a three-times-a-week aerobics class, one that he occasionally leads.

“I’m going to do it as long as I can,” he says. “I figure that’s what’s keeping me alive.”

Science suggests he’s right. Exercise has been proven to help the heart, strengthen bones and the brain, and improve mood and balance. A half-hour a day of physical activity, even in 10-minute increments, boosts life expectancy by almost four years, according to a 2012 National Cancer Institute study of 650,000 people.

“Exercise is the only thing – and you should underline that – that helps everything associated with aging,” says Janice Schwartz, a professor of medicine at UC San Francisco. “And anyone can do it.”

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