

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's Health and Wellness show where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I am Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest today is Lorri Holt. She is a coach with the Rock Steady Boxing program and an advocate for fighting back against Parkinson's disease. Good Morning, Lorri.

Lorri Holt: Good morning.

Katie Johnson: Thank you so much for joining me. As our listeners may or may not know, April is Parkinson's Awareness Month and it's a great time to celebrate a one year anniversary of our Rock Steady Boxing program and bring some more awareness around Parkinson's disease and ways not only through rock Steady Boxing but other ways that we can further understand it. Further fight back, possibly even do some things to prevent the disease. So thanks for joining me. Let's maybe start with some background on Parkinson's disease. Help us understand a little bit about what it is and what it looks like in a person once the disease is discovered.

Katie Johnson: Okay, well Parkinson's is a neurological disease. What it does is it decreases in the amount of dopamine that the brain is making, which causes all kinds of things to happen in your body. Some of the first things that people notice might be less arm movement because it usually affects one side or the other, at first. You might have a foot that's dragging a little bit or you might notice a tremor. The tremor could be in your foot, it could be in your hand, it could be in a finger and it's different for every single person. There's nothing that says, "Oh, yep, you have this so you have Parkinson's disease." There's nothing definite that is specific enough that shows us exactly what the disease is because it affects everybody differently.

Katie Johnson: Very, very complex in that way. When we talk about treatment for Parkinson's, there are some medications I know that either mimic or try to restore that loss of dopamine to the brain, but as much as there is medication recommended, there's typically exercise recommended as part of a treatment regime for Parkinson's, which is why Rock Steady Boxing came to be if I understand?

Katie Johnson: It is yes. So if you have Parkinson's, it's very important to keep moving. You can do any kind of exercising. It's going to help. If you sit and do nothing, you're going to keep getting stiffer and stiffer and your mobility is going to get less and less. But if you get out there and you exercise, and it's every day you have to exercise, and Rock Steady Boxing did come about because of that. And it's been around since 2006. In 2012, they started affiliate programs that started originally in Indianapolis, Indiana. And since 2012, they now have over 700 affiliates in the United States and around the world. Isn't that crazy?

Katie Johnson: Wow, that is, and it's so cool to think that we have one in Fergus Falls. As I mentioned before, this is right around the one year mark since Rock Steady

Boxing started in Fergus. Can you tell us a little bit more about how and why it started here and maybe why you became involved?

Lorri Holt: Yes, I'd love to. So my husband has Parkinson's, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's about 11 years ago and he and I have both become pretty big advocates for Parkinson's disease, trying to help people with whatever we can. And trying to be real positive about it. We heard about the Rock Steady Boxing program and I said, "I think I'd like to go and learn more about it and go and get certified." So I went to Indianapolis, Indiana and I became certified. I thought, "I could maybe come back and teach a few classes." Well, it was a lot more than what I ever thought it would be. And it's a fabulous class and we needed it here in Fergus Falls. We need it everywhere. It's such a great program.

Lorri Holt: So I came back and with a lot of help from a few people, it took us a year, but we have the program going and it's going here at Lake Region Healthcare over at the Mehl Center. We have three other coaches beside myself, so Mick Siems and Krisjohn Veum from over at Mill Street are both coaches. And also, Nancy Symens from here at Lake Region is also a coach.

Katie Johnson: And what does the first year looked like in terms of participation and progress amongst participants? Tell us a little bit about what the impact of the class has been.

Lorri Holt: It's been really neat. We have about 15 boxers that box with us right now. And it's so neat to watch the comradery that's growing between these people, both men and women, the friendships that they're forming, how they cheer each other on to work harder to get better. If somebody can do something for the first time, they're all cheering about it. So it's really cool because they all have Parkinson's, so they all are in it together. So they're really helping each other. And it's tough. It's not an easy program to come and work out and do.

Lorri Holt: It's tough because we push them and we push them just a little bit beyond their limits because that's what's going to help them get a little bit more edge over the Parkinson's. So maybe instead of walking with a walker or a cane, maybe they're going to be able to walk on their own because they're exercising harder or maybe cognitive issues. Maybe they're going to be able to think through something better because Parkinson's effects that too. So it's really a program that gives you hope that you aren't going to just deteriorate. You're going to fight this disease and we fight it together every day.

Katie Johnson: And I have personally seen that. I sometimes come to a CrossFit class that's either right before or right after a Rock Steady class and I'm always just inspired by the positive energy and the camaraderie that you do see that community amongst the class and I'm really happy to see that. I believe you also have a place for volunteers in your program? Is that right?

Lorri Holt: Oh, we do, and we have some fabulous volunteers. Right now, I think we have six volunteers, which is great, but we're always looking for more. And the volunteers come in, they help us because sometimes our boxers might have trouble with balance. So we need somebody just to help spot them. They'll set up equipment for us. They're there to help with whatever we need to. And it takes, it's about an hour and a half is our class is how long it is, so it takes about two hours of your time. And most of them, they participate twice a week in our class. So the volunteers, they're so needed in our program and we just value them so much.

Katie Johnson: Oh, I can imagine. So let's talk a little bit more about the classes for Parkinson's Awareness Month and celebrating your one-year anniversary. You're inviting everyone to come in and check out a class for free. And that would include anyone interested in volunteering.

Lorri Holt: Absolutely.

Katie Johnson: Anyone interested in being a boxer themselves or just learning more about the program. So tell us how they can do that. When are the classes and when can people stop by next week?

Lorri Holt: On Monday, we'll have class from 1:15 to 2:30 and that's when we welcome anybody to come and join us. On Tuesday we do a Parkinson stretch exercise class at 9:30 in the morning and that goes from 9:30 in the morning until 10:15, then we all go over to Lake Region Healthcare Cafe and we have coffee together. It's a great time just to sit and visit and talk about each other, our friendships and also that's where they really talk about things too that they might need support on.

Lorri Holt: On Wednesday, next week we will not be having class because there is a annual Parkinson Symposium that'll be going on. It's the 11th annual Parkinson Symposium. It's held at the Holiday Inn in Fargo, North Dakota. It is a really big day. Everyone who has Parkinson's or caretakers are welcome to come and it starts at 10 o'clock in the morning. It goes till 4:00 lunch is provided. This is a free event, so if you're interested and you'd like to get registered for it, the phone number is 1-800-796-5310. You need to register by April 19th so that's coming up soon. But it's a great symposium. We learned so much there. They have really good classes for us.

Katie Johnson: And you have a group from Fergus Falls going or are they with you?

Lorri Holt: Absolutely, yes, yes.

Katie Johnson: Nice. And then you have a class again on Thursday, is that right?

- Lorri Holt: We do. We do. So Thursday, April 25th, we'll also be having a class and that one's later. So hopefully we can hook into some people that might be working, so maybe they can come and join us after work. The class is going to go from 4:00 till 5:30 and that one too will be open to the public. So come on in and watch. Maybe work out with us a little bit.
- Katie Johnson: Next week will be a great opportunity to do that. Anything else you want our listeners to know? Either about Rock Steady Boxing, about Parkinson's, about how to become involved in and proactive in the fight against Parkinson's disease?
- Lorri Holt: Rock Steady Boxing, it sounds like all we do is box, but it isn't. So this program is designed so you're stretching. You're stretching all those stiff muscles. You're using your mind because we're doing a lot of cognitive activities, so we're really trying to sharpen up your mind. Then yes, we do boxing and it's really fun and we do a lot of laughing. We do a lot of laughing and just having fun together. So it's a great program and it's something to get up and look forward to and just something to say, "Hey, I'm not going to let this Parkinson's beat me, I'm going to beat it."
- Katie Johnson: That's right. So next week, starting Monday, April 22nd classes that are open Monday, Tuesday and Thursday for you to join in. If you'd like to go to the symposium in Fargo on Wednesday, that's an option too. We'll have all this information on our website. We have a Rock Steady Boxing page under the wellness tab at lrhc.org or, of course, you can call the Mehl Center anytime as well. And the phone number there is 218-736-8451.
- Lorri Holt: Oh, thank you so much for having me today, and I just really want to help spread the word around that there is hope for people that have Parkinson's. And you know what? We have help right here in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Come on and join us and join our Rock Steady Boxing program.
- Katie Johnson: And a big reason for that is you. So thank you for what you've done for, for Parkinson's and for Rock Steady Boxing here. Lorri Holt, a coach in the Rock Steady Boxing program and an advocate for fighting back against Parkinson's disease. My guest today during Parkinson's Awareness Month on Apple a Day. Lorri and Katie remind you there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.