

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

O.J. MURPHY

Fit and fabulous

About the author

Barbara Ravage moved to Cape Cod from her native New York City in 2000, after the youngest of her children went off to college. She considers heavy doses of ocean air and Cape light the best cure for emptiest syndrome.

A graduate of Barnard College, she is the author of nine books, including a biography of Rachel Carson for middle-school students and "Burn Unit: Saving Lives After the Flames," which explores the history and science of burn treatment.

She balances her writing life with yoga, karate, and pottery. After years of making do with two summer weeks on the Cape, her favorite part about living here is that she's already home.



Olive Murphy leads her 7 a.m. Monday exercise class at Wily's Gym in Orleans. Murphy is a native and a descendent from the Mayflower and from one of the last real farming families in Orleans.

CAPE COD TIMES/MERRILY LUNSFORD

BY BARBARA RAVAGE

If it's 7 a.m. at Wily's Gym in Orleans, you'll find the glass-and-mirror-walled exercise classroom filled with people – mostly women, but a smattering of men – all on the other side of 50, some considerably so. Three mornings a week, the faithful come together for Healthy U. This all-around workout may not have been designed for older fitness buffs, but has over time become a magnet for them. If it's a Friday, chances are a perky, yet elegant blue-eyed blonde will be at the front of the room, putting them through their paces.

Her name is O.J. Murphy, and she drives a shiny black Mercedes station wagon with a license plate that reads "Land Ho." O.J. is like a glass of champagne: bubbly with a touch of class. She has been teaching at Wily's for 18 years, and is certified by the Aerobics and Fitness Association of America (AFFA). She maintains her certification by taking workshops, master classes, and a written exam each year. In addition to Healthy U, she teaches Step Fusion and Total Body classes, which attract a generally younger clientele, and often substitutes for other instructors. On top of all that, she takes one or two classes every day, to learn new things to use in her own teaching, but also to keep herself fit. "I have a passion for this," she says, and it's clearly no understatement.

At 59, she says she works hard to keep herself healthy. Heaven knows, she doesn't look her age. When she goes to the doctor, she's used to hearing: "You have the blood pressure of a 20-year-old athlete." She insists she's not trying to be 20 again. "We have stages in our lives and I'm in this one. I just have a goal to stay healthy. I see the results of exercise. It really does make a difference."

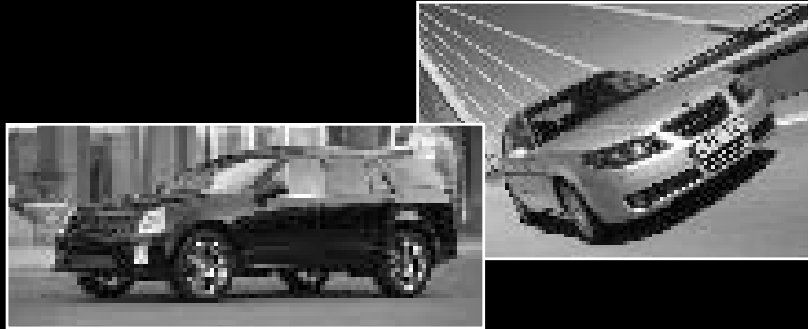
That's why she wants to encourage everyone, including people who are

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overweight, on medication for high blood pressure or high cholesterol, or who think they're too old for the gym, to put some exercise in their lives. "Once you feel the benefits of what you're doing for yourself, it's almost an addictive thing. It makes your day. All of a sudden a light goes off in your head: Wow, I really feel better!"

Of course, people with health problems should talk to a doctor before beginning or changing a fitness routine.

O.J. is a nickname she acquired in college, but growing up in Orleans she was called Olive Jean. No sense asking what brought her to the Cape. She was born here and can trace the Ellis side of her family back to the Mayflower. On the other side, the Taylors ran one of the last working farms in town, out on Barley Neck, overlooking the ocean. O.J. remembers the cows and horses, chickens and pigs, selling fresh milk house to house and haying in the fall. "Those were fun

days," she says.

Her uncle, Alvin Taylor, was at the center of it all, and after his death it was hard for the family to keep the farm going. Little by little, parcels were sold off until the area was dotted with multimillion-dollar homes and the Taylor Farm was just a memory.

O.J. graduated from Nauset Regional High School and went off to college in Maine and then Boston. At the time, she just wanted to get away from the Cape. "The place shut down from Labor Day to Memorial Day," she recalls. Even the movie theater, which stood on the Main Street corner now occupied by CVS, closed for the winter.

She was back home waitressing one summer in the early '70s when she and a few friends stopped at the Land-Ho after work. Now an anchor of the year-round community, the watering hole had recently been bought by a washashore named John Murphy. The handsome proprietor carded O.J., and remarked that he was sure her I.D. was legit because such a pretty girl would never fake such an ugly name as Olive Jean! If that was intended as a pick-up line, it worked.

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O.J. and John have been married 35 years, and the Land-Ho has become a family affair, with their three grown sons, John, Trevor, and Dillon, joining their parents in running the place. O.J. works in the office, and hires and trains the wait staff, while her husband John, a garrulous man with the Irish gift for storytelling, is a familiar presence at the bar.

It was John who provided the impetus for one of the hallmarks of O.J.'s Healthy U class, functional moves. "My husband bent down to pick something up in the parking lot at the restaurant and hurt his back, with just that one little move." It got her thinking about "all the little things we do each day, whether it's reaching into closets, up to high shelves, behind the couch, down to pick something up."

"So many people tell me they hurt their back doing something like that," she says. "It makes sense to do exercises that strengthen the parts of the body we use in daily activities. So I started introducing functional moves into class, which use the same muscles as when we're reaching, stooping, vac-

Quickhits

O.J. everywhere

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uuming, picking up something heavy, the sorts of things we do at home."

O.J. plans her classes in a small gym she set up in her garage. She keeps both variety and safety in mind. "I try always to look at the class I'm teaching. I pay attention to how people

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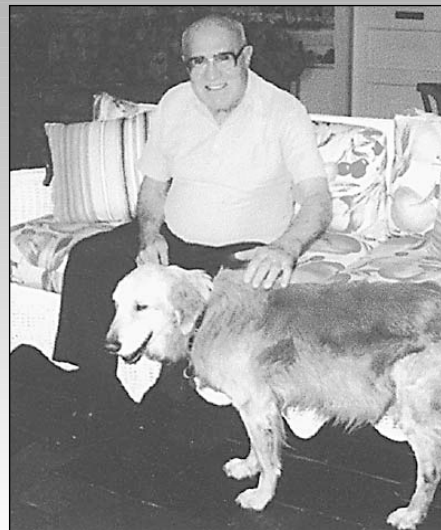
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are doing. I try to motivate them, but don't want them to feel overwhelmed." For Healthy U, in addition to working with weights and getting hearts pumping with music-fueled cardio exercise, O.J. ensures the routine includes plenty of opportunities to improve balance and flexibility with stretching and twisting. Regulars leave the nonstop hour-long class with smiles on their faces and a bounce in their steps.

O.J. may remember the long winters of her Orleans childhood, but these days she heads off to Costa Rica after Thanksgiving, not to return until Easter. Not that she's lounging in the sand and basking in the sun. She's working as hard as ever as owner of Land-Ho at Hotel Villa Serena, a beachside resort she bought 11 years ago.

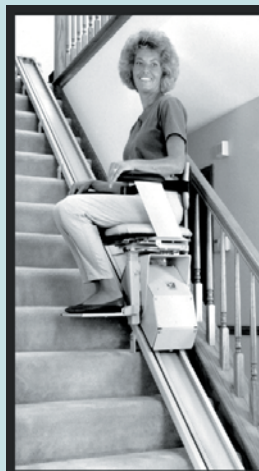
The way she tells it, about 16 years ago, one of her avid surfer sons started lobbying for a family vacation on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica, which boasts some of the best surfing beaches in the world. That's how they discovered Playa Junquillal in Guanacaste province, a tropical paradise in an unspoiled rural area of the Central American country. They loved it so much that they returned every year. One day, O.J. met a local woman while running on the beach and later learned a small hotel nearby was for sale. In short order, she found herself with a new business and the perfect person to manage it.

O.J. spends the high season in Playa Junquillal. In recent years, John has been joining her while John, Jr., and Dillon hold down the fort in Orleans. Trevor, a Cordon Bleu-trained chef, presides over the kitchen at La Serena. The hotel has 12 rooms in the main building and 14 private cabañas. No surprise, there are exercise classes run by O.J. herself. She even became a licensed esthetician, attending the Blaine School in Hyannis, so she could offer spa services, from massages and body wraps to facials and manicures, and more.

She happily welcomes Cape Codders looking for respite from the winter cold. Even summer visitors to Orleans who enjoy the warm atmosphere of Land-Ho have sought out the warmth of its tropical outpost.



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