

A WORLD OF OPTIONS

Holistic Healer in Heights Marks 20 Years of Offering Healthy Options

By Tim Alexander for the *Peoria Times-Observer*

At first glance, it looks more like an auto garage or a second-hand store than a place for health and healing.

But in a nondescript, single-level brick building located at 4316 N. Prospect Rd. in Peoria Heights, Helen Cox has been practicing her own unique style of holistic healing for the past three years of her 20-year career in alternative medicine. The former nurse (she's a RN, BSN, and LDN) set aside her career in traditional medicine to found Options Center for Health and Education, Inc., in 1985- becoming Peoria's only holistic health/alternative medicine center staffed by a registered nurse and a licensed dietitian nutritionist.

Since then, she's never looked back.

Cox, who resides north of Spring Bay, said people come to Options because they want to learn more about the center's approach to preventive medicine, they want to get well without using medications, or they want to know if the supplements they are taking are actually beneficial to them.

"The majority come to our health center because they're not getting the help they want with the traditional medical model," said Cox.

Options also offers an education center, mostly geared toward younger people with behavioral problems. Cox uses hair analysis to determine deficiencies in patient's diets and chemical makeup.

"There are materials in the body that can tell you how you are doing, such as which (chemicals) are too low or too high, or what kinds of food you need to be eating," Cox explained.

Saliva analysis is also utilized in diagnosing a patient's needs.

"With hair and saliva, we can see what your (health) trends are, such as high blood pressure, find them, and correct them," Cox said. "You can pick up things happening in your cells sometimes 20 years before you can with blood work."

Cox is also certified to offer classes and workshops with names such as "Brain Gym" and "Touch for Health".

Another aspect of Cox's approach to healing is what she calls "body/mind work," or how a person's mental health can affect their physical fitness.

"If you ask people if stress affects how they feel, they usually say yes. We determine the causes of their stress, set goals as to how a person wants to feel, and then develop a number of techniques to help people change their perceptions," said Cox. "If you believe you're going to die before you get to 50, you probably will."

Changing Perceptions

Though the building Options is located in does not meet the physical model of a modern, futuristic health care center, once a person enters the building, perceptions change dramatically. And changing perceptions is, of course, what Options is all about.

Colorful, well-maintained furnishings, a friendly staff (comprised of office manager Mary Maubach and assistant Jamika Russell), and a sense of quiet healing permeate the

interior of the building. A large sunroom/library is at the disposal of Options' clientele, further enhancing the feeling of well-being. Books in the center's library sport titles such as "Staying Healthy With the Seasons" and "Smart Moves"; VHS tapes include "101 Miracles of Natural Healing," and cassettes are marked with titles such as "Living in the Light" and "Focusing Healing Vortex Energy".

Cox herself co-authored a book, *Alternative Health Care: Space-Age Interpretations of Age-Old Truths*.

Cox began her journey into holistic medicine in 1979, when the nurse began to see a chiropractor for her own health problems. The chiropractor turned out to be a holistic healer.

"In ten months I felt better than I ever had in my life," Cox recalled.

She began to study the practice through her chiropractor, who allowed Cox to read books from his library and to ask him ten questions about holistic medicine every time she visited.

After initially seeing a small group of patients in her den at home, Cox decided to go into business for herself in '85, first locating in East Peoria. After four years, she moved to a building at 4700 N. Prospect, where she remained for 11 years before moving the business to its current location.

"Options has evolved, grown, and expanded," Cox said proudly. "I love what I do."

Loyal Clientele

Cox does not do a lot of traditional advertising to create awareness for Options. Aside from a monthly article she writes for Peoria Woman magazine, word-of-mouth from her faithful clientele, a web presence (www.options-center.com) and an occasional yellow pages ad comprise the extent of the center's marketing campaign.

Options boasts a lot of "lifetime" clients, Cox said.

"You always want to eat healthy. You always want to do prevention, and we all have stress," are some of the reasons she cites in explanation of the number of faithful customers Options claims.

A Chicago woman, Emmy, has traveled to Cox's Options Center for treatment for the last 18 years, coming every month or two.

"Traveling from Chicago has never been a hardship compared to all the benefits I've gotten from working with Helen," Emmy testifies. "I like the fact that I am actively involved in my treatment. I credit my wellness, at all levels, to our work together."

Helping people get well, stay well, and preventing degenerative diseases are the three main goals Cox cites in her quest to make her clients physically healthier. However, emotional health is assigned equal import at Options.

"I just want people to be happy," said the soft-spoken, quietly intense healer, who describes herself as "self-trained" in her own unique brand of holistic medicine. "Options is here because we do have options...that's what it's named for. A lot of people don't see any options."

Kinder, Gentler Medicine

Although Options' brand of alternative medicine could be described as "kinder and gentler" than that of its traditional forefather, Cox said sometimes her brand of self-

disciplined required to succeed under her programs leads to a clash of wills with some clients.

“Sometimes people don’t like to do what I say,” Cox laughed. “Changing what they eat is the hardest thing I ask people to do. There is social pressure (in that). You’ve got to be really motivated to change what you eat. I’m just the catalyst; they have to do all the work.”

Cox said because of that, “we don’t have 100 percent retention” of clients.

To help their clients acquire fresher, more organic foods, Options coordinates with two food-share organizations that make regular drop-offs to the center or sometimes directly to the customer’s door.

Concerning her motivation to enter alternative medicine, Cox took a moment before answering:

“One of my prayers is that I never wanted to hurt anyone. When I was a nurse, one of the biggest fears I had was that I knew that with one ‘med’ error I could cause tremendous problems. It caused tremendous tension for me. Now, I don’t have that. I can’t hurt anybody with hair analysis or with Brain Gym or with the counseling I do, and I’m wise enough not to hurt anyone with my supplements. It’s safe ground where I am.

“The medical model monitors degeneration. I want people to know they can get better.”