

Laugh for the health of it: Hopkins woman makes laughing her job

By Alyssa Krekelberg

February 5, 2015 at 8:59 am

Sarah Routman used to teach English and drama, but left it all behind to follow her passion: laughter.

Routman is building her business, Laugh For The Health Of It, around making people laugh. People hire Routman to do Laughter Yoga with them at house parties, over-the-phone, corporate events, and non-profit events. She has done Laughter Yoga with the American Lung Association and Holocaust survivors. Not only does Routman offer Laughter Yoga classes, but she gives training sessions to people wanting to become a certified Laughter Yoga Leader or to those that want to learn how to incorporate this kind of laughter into their everyday jobs and life.

So what is Laughter Yoga.

It's a group exercise routine developed by Dr. Madan Kataria. A Laughter Yoga Leader uses special guided techniques to make people produce real or fake laughter. This laughter is initiated in a group where eye contact with group members is required and a child-like playfulness is the result. Forceful laughter soon turns into real laughter that becomes contagious.

Routman likes to say that Laughter Yoga is "heavy on the laughter, light on the yoga."

Laughter Yoga uses the deep breathing exercises you will find in yoga and laughter exercises. These exercises oxygenate the brain and body, which makes people feel energetic and healthy.

"The amazing thing about this is you don't have to have a sense of humor, you don't have to think it's funny. The only thing you have to is be willing," said Routman about Laughter Yoga.

Not only is laughing fun, but it's also healthy.

Laughter reduces blood pressure, releases endorphins to the brain, and strengthens the immune system. And it doesn't need to be real laughter to get these benefits.

[Routman \(front\) shares a laugh with her clients. \(Submitted photo\)](#)

Routman (front) shares a laugh with her clients. (Submitted photo)

"The truth is, your body doesn't know the difference between real and intentional laughter," said Routman.

Routman has worked with the company HIRED, which helps people that are unemployed find jobs. She was invited to join them at their annual summit, and did a Laughter Yoga session with over 100 people.

"Imagine that you're long term unemployed, so you need that laughter to boost your depression, anxiety, and stress levels. Instead of showing up discouraged at a job interview, you could do laughter exercises before the interview to send endorphins to the brain," Routman said.

A typical session with Routman involves interacting with others. Routman starts off by getting people to do smile push-ups, which involves giving a big smile, dropping the smile, and then smiling again. Then, people walk around and introduce themselves by saying their name and giving a laugh.

During her sessions, Routman does laughter exercises while also explaining the health benefits of laughter.

One laughter exercise is called jibberish. During this exercise people have a conversation with one another without

using real words, which Routman says always ends up in fits of laughter.

Another exercise Routman does with her clients is having them act out turning on an imaginary car that refuses to start. With every twist of the key and press on the gas, people let out a laugh.

When people get winded from these exercises, that's when the yoga stretching and breathing comes into play.

"By the time you're done with the laughter exercises you've sent endorphins to your brain, so you're feeling happier," said Routman.

To encourage people to laugh just for laughter's sake, there was an event called Global Belly Laugh Day that took place at the end of January. This event could take place anywhere. The only thing people had to do at 1:24 p.m. on January 24 was smile, throw their arms in the air and laugh out loud.

Naturally, Routman was a part of it.

"I think it's a great way to spread laughter, especially right now when all these horrible things are happening in our world. We really need laughter" Routman said about this event.

During Global Belly Laugh Day, Routman attended a celebration at the Ronald McDonald House Charities in Minneapolis. At this celebration, Routman did Laughter Yoga with the kids living at Ronald McDonald House.

"This is a population of people that don't think they have a reason to laugh, and yet the kids often are really playful and silly and fun," said Routman. "Sometimes when we don't feel like laughing is when we need it the most"