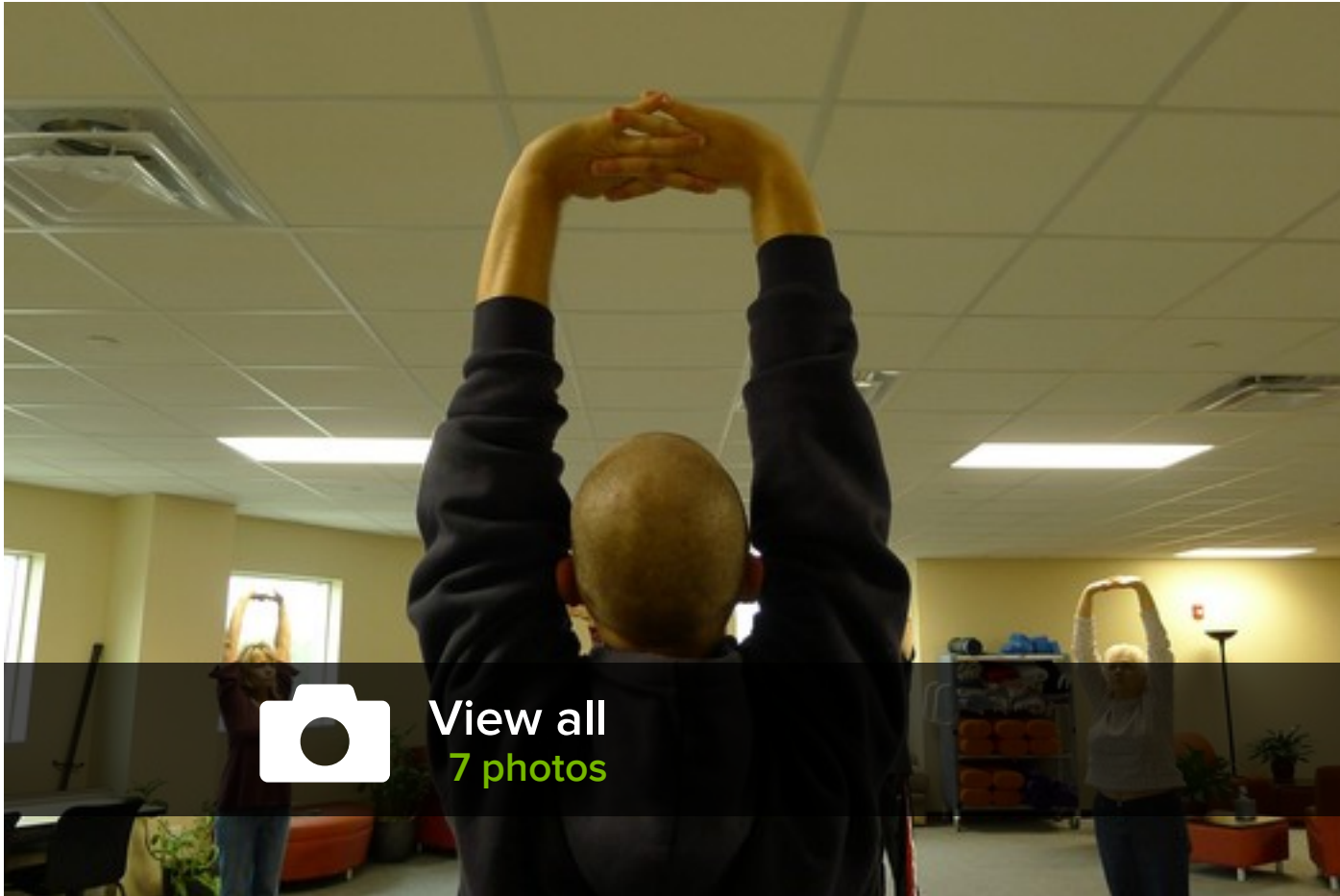


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Tai Chi & Qigong at Simmons Cancer Institute

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Tai Chi and Qigong classes at Simmons Cancer Institute
Simmons Cancer Institute

The mission of the [Simmons Cancer Institute](#) in Springfield, Illinois is to serve the people of central and southern Illinois by addressing their cancer care needs through medical education, biomedical research, patient care, and community service. The Simmons Cancer Institute belongs to the School of Medicine at Southern Illinois University (SIU), and its “[Side by Side Wellness Health Program](#)” has been providing valuable health benefits to cancer survivors in the region by offering free [mind-body exercise](#) classes, which can be a great model for other health care institutes.

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Simmons Cancer Institute

Loretta Johnson, 65, was diagnosed with breast cancer in late 2007. She went through surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. She recalled that she was fatigued from chemotherapy. Fortunately, the “Side by Side Wellness Health Program” offered free yoga classes. Loretta took them and gained strength and flexibility. But she continued to have a problem sleeping. There was a time that she could not sleep through a night for three straight months. She decided to try Reiki at the “Side by Side” program. After the first class, she was able to sleep through the night for two consecutive days. After the second class, she was able to sleep through night for three consecutive days. So she signed up for a weekly Reiki class to improve her sleep quality. She feels fortunate that the “Side by Side” program continues to offer more mind-body exercise classes like [Qigong](#) and [Tai Chi](#) classes. More than two years ago, she joined the Qigong classes. She has been learning [Eight Sections of Brocade \(or Ba Duan Jin\)](#), basic Tai Chi movements, and Tai Chi Push Hands from instructor [Matt Jackson](#) (see photos). She claimed that there is a transformation in her. She was physically active and did elliptical-type exercises five times a week and lifted weights three times a week for years before cancer. Since the surgery, she has continued elliptical exercises and weight lifting. By adding the “Side by Side” classes, she has become much stronger, especially at her core, more flexible, and with better balance than before the cancer occurred. Her overall biomedical conditions have improved. She only needs to take one mammogram instead of two each year and no longer needs an annual MRI.

Loretta stated that her short-term memory and ability to focus was impacted due to chemotherapy. But yoga, Qigong, and Tai Chi help her to focus, and her thoughts do not wander anymore. During a recent presentation to a group, she caught herself talking too fast. With the techniques she learned from the Qigong classes, she was able to relax her mind and breathe smoothly.

The “Side by Side” program is generous. It provides free classes not only to Simmons Center’s patients, but also to other cancer patients in the region. Furthermore, the patients’ family can also take advantage of this free program to enhance their health so they can be better care providers.

Loren, Loretta’s husband for 42 years, witnessed the results in her and decided to join the yoga and Qigong classes 18 months ago. Loretta commented that his posture has improved a great deal.

Loren and Loretta share a passion of dancing. They have been dancing together for 30 years and

learning ballroom dancing for years. Yoga and Qigong classes help them to be more flexible, balanced, and relaxed so they dance better. **There is also the unexpected benefit that with the Tai Chi Push Hands training, they have become more sensitive to each other's body movements. He is better in leading, she is better in following his lead, and they are dancing in greater harmony now.**

Loretta considers the “Side by Side” program a great gift. She is extremely appreciative of Simmons Cancer Institute. Kristin Lessen, Outreach Director at the Simmons Cancer Institute, stated that the “Side by Side” program is funded by grants and annual fundraiser “[Denim & Diamonds](#)”. Loretta said that she is willing to pay for classes if one day the Simmons Institute can no longer afford the free program. At the same time, Loretta thinks that medical insurance should cover the costs of these types of classes since they are an important part of a [healing](#) process.

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Violet Li

Tai Chi Examiner