George Negus Tonight :: health :: Grey Panthers 2010

Episode 2
Grey Panthers
Interviewer: Shelly Horton
Interviewees: Kay Brown, Greta Quong

We all know the saying move it or lose it. And that advice becomes more pertinent the older we get. Shelly Horton went to Darwin to meet a group of women who are not letting age slow them down - as a matter of fact, it can't hold them back.
GEORGE NEGUS: If you're a middle-aged woman or even older who's worked through a severe illness but can feel her mobility and independence slipping away, what do you do? Book yourself into the nearest nursing home, or what? Here's Shelly Horton with an answer to that question.

SHELLY HORTON, REPORTER: Meet Greta Quong. She's in her 70s. And this is Kay Brown. She's in her 60s. These two may look like your typical retirees enjoying the gentle, relaxed pace of the Northern Territory, but they are anything but typical. Kay and Greta are members of the Grey Panthers, Darwin's most energetic and healthiest matriarchs. The Grey Panthers formed in 1988 to perform two specific dance events. As it turns out, 15 years later, they're still going strong.

KAY BROWN, GREY PANTHER: It's a group of wonderful senior women wanting to keep fit and healthy rather than sitting around in an armchair all day.

SHELLY HORTON: Dance company Tracks provides choreographers to put the women through their paces. They're now in training for the Darwin Festival.

But while they're getting their buzz out of performing, they're also improving their cardiovascular fitness, strength, balance and endurance. Currently, there are about 20 members. To join, you have to be over 50. Most are over 60, many are in their 70s and some are even in their 80s. The only prerequisite is Grey Panthers have to accept any challenge, even line dancing. There is one thing that stops them in their tracks. They have instructed the choreographers to eliminate any moves that reveal their 'ta-ta flaps'.

What is a ta-ta flap? (Laughs)

KAY BROWN: Do I have to show you?

SHELLY HORTON: You don't have to show me.

KAY BROWN: (Points to upper arm) You know, that bit that hangs down there that's all floppy.

SHELLY HORTON: Why do they call it a ta-ta flap?

KAY BROWN: Because when you wave ta-ta, it flaps. (Laughs) Oh, please!

SHELLY HORTON: Research shows older adults who live an active lifestyle not only feel younger but they actually have the physical skills of people 15 years their junior. What more evidence do you need for the 'move it or lose it' theory?

DAVID MCMICKEN, CHOREOGRAPHER: There was a lot of feedback - doctors talking about the women having a much stronger heart, much stronger leg work, better lung capacity, general flexibility. And one of the main things the doctors kept saying is that the women were happier - they're much happier.

GRETA QUONG, GREY PANTHER: 10 years ago, I had a serious op, I had a bowel cancer. And as soon as I was able to, back to class. And the teachers are just wonderful. They know. They know what your body can do and how much to let us do, yeah.

SHELLY HORTON: So what could possibly be next for the Grey Panthers?

WOMAN 1: The hula. We've got the skirts now.

(Women laugh)

KAY BROWN: Maybe salsa or something like that.

WOMAN 2: Not belly dancing.

(Women laugh)

WOMAN 1: I've got the belly for it. (Laughs)

WOMAN 2: Not belly dancing.

KAY BROWN: I think we're game enough to try anything.

(Women laugh)

SHELLY HORTON: Greta and Kay, I've had so much fun today. I desperately want to be a Grey Panther. Can I join?

KAY BROWN: You're far too young.

GRETA QUONG: Too young! Oh, Shelly, too young!

SHELLY HORTON: Not fair!

GEORGE NEGUS: (Laughs) Shelly! I think she was fishing for that line, actually. Darwin's Grey Panthers. And Shelly tells us the mighty Panthers are available for all sporting events, and probably weddings, parties and bar mitzvahs as well. Honeymoons? Well, maybe not honeymoons.