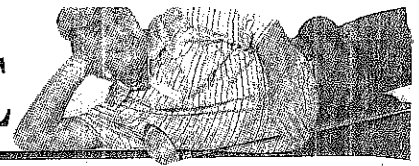


# PAR FOR THE COURSE



## Healing power of the links

Golf therapy brightens the lives of victims of stroke and other conditions.

Feeling sorry for yourself because your golf game stinks?

Worried about breaking 90 again? If you saw Joe Mazzilli, Kimely Fitzgerald, Bryan McGugan, Sue Starratt, Art LeClair or Peter Simoes chipping and putting at East Park Golf Gardens on Monday nights, you might have second thoughts.

To them, getting a grip on life, not the golf club, is all that matters.

The six are recovering from strokes, brain injury or serious injuries from motor vehicle accidents that have left them with paralysis, limited movement and balance problems. The group is participating in a program called therapeutic golf rehabilitation, which combines 10 therapy sessions with six golf lessons.

London physiotherapist Sari Shatil developed the program for clients to improve their quality of life, have some fun golfing and improve balance. The program, which includes stretching and physical drills before the weekly golf lesson, is also designed to decrease pain, increase flexibility and improve golf performance.

"It's remarkable to see the improvement," Shatil said. "We formally measure their balance at the beginning and the end."

The therapy takes place at The Downtown Clinic, where Shatil is director of the neurological program.

At East Park, golf instructor Adam Bilyea shows participants the basics on the putting green. Shatil and another therapist, Kendra Kasubeck, work with the group. At the end of six weeks, the participants try to play nine holes of golf.

Joe Mazzilli, 69, whose son Frank was MPP for London-Fanshawe when the Progressive Conservatives were in power, suffered brain swelling last September and now requires a wheelchair and has speech problems. He spent six months in hospital.

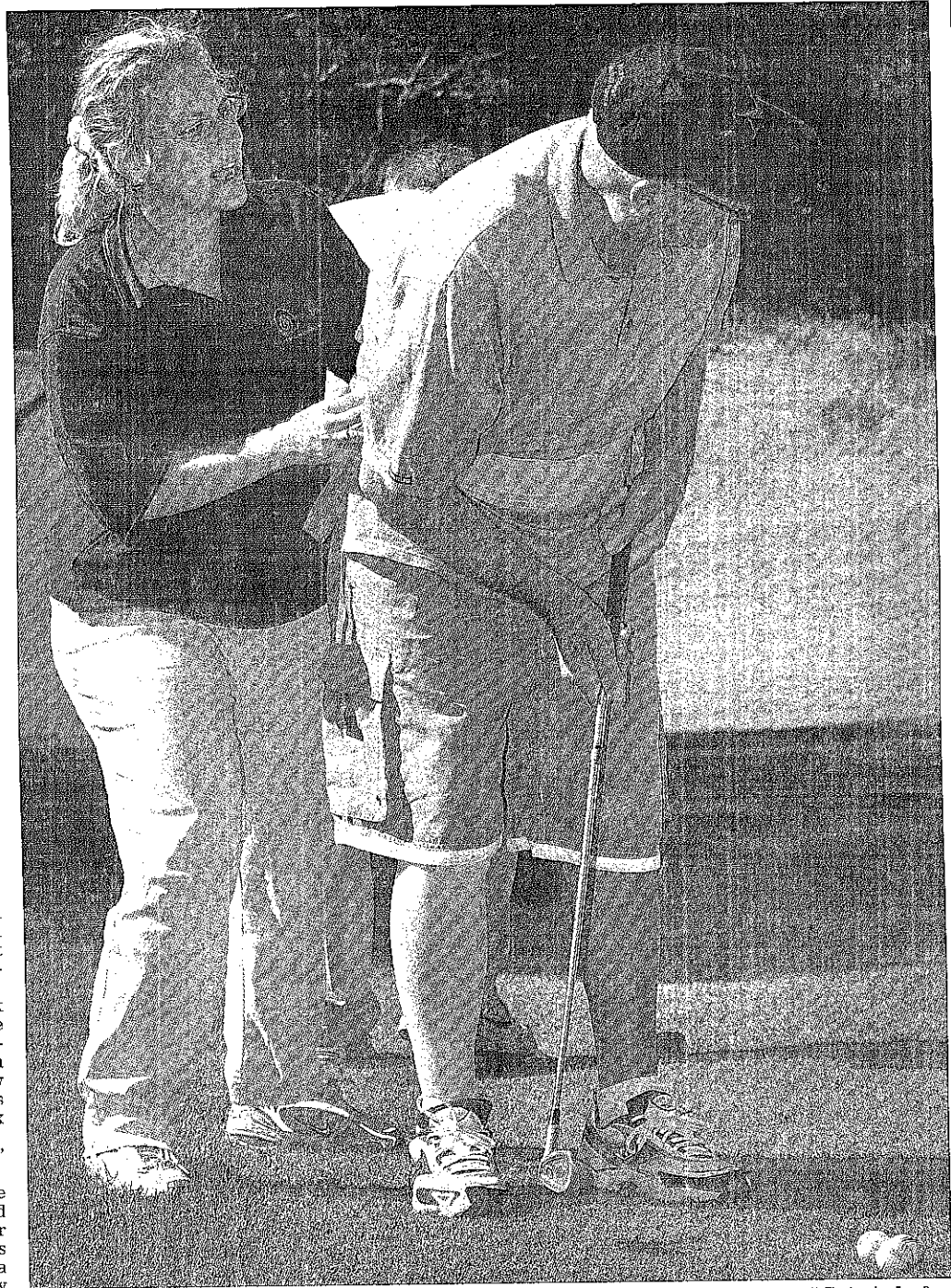
"Dad never played golf before," daughter Anna Mazzilli said.

"We're more interested in the physiotherapy, not the golf. Dad was active as a gardener, walker and cyclist in Springbank Park. It's a miracle he's here. This was a Father's Day gift from me and my brothers John and Frank."

Sue Starratt, 66, played golf before she had a stroke in 2003. She's playing again.

"I took the course last year — it was fabulous," she said. "It got me steady on my feet, which I wasn't before."

Kimely Fitzgerald, 35, never golfed before she had a stroke in 2001, leaving her paralysed on the right side. She said she was bored spending nine months in hospital.



DEREK RUTTAN The London Free Press

**PUTTING PRACTICE:** Therapist Sari Shatil helps Joe Mazzilli with his putting skills at East Park Golf Gardens. Mazzilli, 69, spent six months in hospital after suffering a brain swelling and now requires a wheelchair and has speech problems.

She saw a sign in the hospital three years ago advertising the golf therapy program and signed up.

"I wanted to do something other than walk on a treadmill in a gym," she said.

Fitzgerald said her walking, flexibility and stamina have all improved.

"And the golf is fun," she said.

Peter Simoes, 28, suffered a brain injury when he crashed his motorcycle at Hamilton Road and Adelaide Street in 2002. He spent 45 hours in a coma. Simoes said he wasn't getting results from other therapy programs but hopes he will this time.

"This is all new to me," he said. Shatil is "teaching me how to do something without pain."

There is great satisfaction in helping people.

"The (golf) therapy they enjoy because it's aimed at something they can do," Shatil said. "The leisure aspect is so powerful."