

Health & Medicine

LaStone

'The Mercedes Benz of hot stone massages'

By Kala Kachmar
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Incense burned. The shades were drawn. The room was warm with heat radiating from a small fireplace. Music played softly in the background. The walls were blue — cozy and calming — adorned with paintings of the ocean.

My body, limp with relaxation, was being massaged rhythmically with hot and cold stones. My thoughts were blurred. My worries temporarily disappeared. And when it was over, I was a new woman.

This was my first experience with LaStone therapy, a massage method that uses hot and cold stones to relax muscles and improve circulation in the body.

Massage therapist Barbara Nelms, who owns Riverbend Therapeutic Massage in South Windsor, performed a 1½-hour session on me, which is the minimum amount of time needed for the full massage, she says.

Riverbend Therapeutic Massage, which employs eight massage therapists, offers Swedish and deep tissue massages, Shiatsu, Reiki, foot reflexology, pregnancy massages, and facials.

A 1½-hour session of LaStone therapy costs \$115 at Riverbend.

"It relaxes every muscle in your body, even the ones we don't touch," Nelms says.

In 1993 LaStone therapy was founded by Mary Hannigan in Tuscon, Ariz. Hannigan first introduced the use of cool stones in massages, which is known as Geo-Thermo-Therapy, Nelms says. Massage therapists who practice LaStone are required to undergo extensive training, she says.

Nelms, who has been practicing LaStone therapy for about 10 years and regular massage therapy for about 20, says the method introduces heat, then cooling in a sequence that relaxes the body. She says the heat relaxes the fibers of the muscles, which increases circulation.

The LaStone massage focuses on the whole body, including the feet, legs, back, arms, face, neck, and torso.

"It's a full body experience," Nelms says.

Some stones are placed to rest on the body, and others are used to perform the massage. Like a Swedish massage, LaStone requires the use of massage oil on the body.

Nelms says there are many different kinds of hot stone massages, but LaStone is not synonymous with a hot stone massage.



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Journal Inquirer reporter Kala Kachmar receives a stone massage from Barbara H. Nelms of Riverbend Therapeutic Massage in South Windsor.

"It's the Mercedes Benz of hot stone massages," she says.

The 70 to 80 stones used in a typical LaStone massage are different sizes that are meant for different parts of the body. At various times, stones are placed on the face, between the toes, and underneath the back, neck, and torso. The person receiving the massage first lays on his or her back and then the stomach.

Larger stones are used to massage the legs, back, and arms, while smaller stones are used to massage the face and neck.

The hot stones used are basalt stones, which have a high iron content and retain heat well. Marble stones are used as the cool stones because they hold in the coldness better, Nelms says. They have to consistently be kept at the right temperature to have the proper effect.

Nelms says the massage speaks to people on a physical and psychological level because it removes people from the

demands of daily life.

"It gives you the chance to commune with yourself in a warm, safe, comfortable environment," Nelms says.

"There's a serenity that comes over you," she says. "That sometimes lasts for days."

And for me, it did.

Nelms says after a La Stone massage, people move slower because they are so relaxed. Many sit in a chair to gather their wits before driving a car.

Immediately after the massage, it took me a few minutes to clean off the massage oil and get dressed. Nelms had to help me put my necklace back on because I couldn't.

About a half-hour afterwards the massage left me feeling more energized, centered, and less stressed. I felt like I woke up from a 12-hour night's sleep.

For more information about LaStone therapy and Riverbend Therapeutic Massage, call 860-436-9901 or visit www.riverbendmassage.com