



PARKINSON'S WARRIORS VIGNETTE



DENNIS COADY

As told to Aliya Reich

Dennis Coady is the owner of Forest Hill Health and Fitness, which is a sponsor of Rock Steady Boxing Forest Hill.

Tell us a little about your relationship with Parkinson's Disease.

Back in 2015, there was an individual who had Parkinson's Disease who was a therapy patient at Forest Hill Health and Fitness and a member of the gym. He asked Dennis if he could put up a boxing bag, as he had heard of the benefits of boxing and of the Rock Steady Boxing program. After boxing a few times a week at the gym, the individual asked if he could bring along some friends with Parkinson's. He started by bringing three or four friends, then five friends, then Dennis put in a second boxing bag, then a third. Dennis decided to get more involved with the Parkinson's community after seeing the interest at the gym and the benefits of the exercise on his regulars, so he started speaking to support groups put on by the PDMD Center, and eventually got funding from Hopkins and Pacing for Parkinson's for more formal boxing program for Parkinson's patients. Dennis originally called the program Step into the Ring, before it was certified Rock Steady Boxing, but it became a certified RSB program in August 2016. According to Dennis, "the program has grown from there - and grown, and grown, and grown." The number of instructors has grown along with the number of interested clients, and the staff there just loves PD patients: "They are such strong people who really want to do the work and get better."

When you think of the Parkinson's community, what word comes to mind?

"Fight!"

What's one piece of advice you would give someone with PD and their community?

Dennis's advice is simple: "Be as active as you can be, exercise as much as you can - you'd be surprised how much it does for you. You'd be surprised how much improvement we've seen [in folks in the RSB program]. Don't let [Parkinson's] get you down - you've got a whole family with you."

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Dennis adds, "Exercise is more positive than it is anything else." He said he's seen young people with Parkinson's go from a wheelchair because of atrophied muscles, to a walker, to a cane, to walking on their own. Folks have heard of Rock Steady Boxing as a program at other places, but Forest Hill is a facility now completely set up for it. They now have seven boxing bags, seven speed bags, and a 2,000 square foot area that they close completely for RSB classes. Their whole crew is really invested, as they offer six classes per week, and see 300-400 people per month.

The motto at the end of every RSB class? "Keep fighting back!"

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