

And now for something completely different:

HEEBONICS

Therapist uses drumming to bring isolated people together

By **LAURA STRICKER**
Staff Reporter

Terri Segal's love of music goes back to her childhood.

"I've always been into music, playing guitar and piano growing up," she said.

Today, the 32-year-old expressive arts therapist is the owner and director of Rhythmic by Nature, which holds group drumming and percussion workshops for schools, social service agencies, summer camps and community events, to name a few.

Her passion for playing the drums began when she was a student at McMaster University, where she studied English.

"I started taking my first African drumming classes and more and more workshops. I found that as I started learning, the main passion was to share, so I would start drum circles... at the university," she said. "Wherever I went, I would gather people together in the community to play music on the drums."

Segal is a graduate of the expressive arts therapy program at the International School for Interdisciplinary Studies (ISIS) Canada.

"That is really what informs my practice," she said of the program. "I'm an expressive arts therapist."

Rhythmic by Nature, which Segal established in 2004, offers drop-in drumming sessions open to the public, corporate sessions, beginner and intermediate drumming courses and wellness sessions.

The health and wellness benefits involved in group drumming are numerous, Segal said. They include social, mental and physical benefits, as well as stress reduction.

"It [drumming] builds a group bond and camaraderie. So, for example, for people who are often isolated, they can come and participate and feel an immediate sense of belonging... That's where the more therapeutic benefits come in – like long-term care for people with mental illness or people who are often marginalized and isolated from day-to-day activities. That's a real great therapeutic benefit.

"[It causes] stress reduction because you can't really think about anything else when you're drumming. It's both mental and physical exercise, because you're playing with both hands.

"It does everything that helps stress lower. It gets the parasympathetic nervous system

activated... into a more relaxed state."

The hour-long workshops start with a drum call, letting people know the session is about to begin. Segal incorporates rhythm and ice-breaker games to get everyone warmed up and comfortable with playing. There is also an educational component involved.

"[We explore] a bit about the drums we're playing, which come from West Africa, to understand, appreciate and respect the cultures from where they come – the musical traditions that are deeply rooted in the people, the land and the culture, which is also an oral tradition that is passed down one generation to the next."

The workshops also teach basic drumming techniques.

"Even though you can tap a drum and get a sound, there's a right way to play the drum, a technique to play it like any instrument," Segal said.

Rhythmic by Nature takes its drumming workshops all across Ontario, "wherever

we're called," Segal said. "I have a branch in Muskoka. We work all over the GTA, and basically all over Ontario, really."

The company has recently undergone an expansion, with associates and lead facilitators working under Segal.

"The expansion now is the associates and lead facilitators. That's basically happened over the last year and a half, where I've been training people, and they're now certified under my guidelines to go out and work for me."

Another area of focus for Rhythmic by Nature is in professional development.

"I offer professional development to organizations, which focuses on implementing their own sustainable drumming programs, including training the staff and purchasing their own set of drums," Segal said. "This has been successful at a number of long-term care facilities and adult day programs."

What she enjoys most about Rhythmic by Nature, Segal said, is getting to work with different people.

"I love working with so many different groups. There's never a dull moment, and it's never the same. How much joy people get from it – that's really fulfilling – and the transformations that happen, small or large or subtle, that happen within the hour.

"I love drumming. I'm a student of the drum. I take classes. It's my passion, my hobby. As I teach, I'm always learning as well," she said.

In order to participate in the drumming circles, being musically inclined is not necessary, Segal said. Anyone can participate.

"You don't have to have any previous musical background, and that's what is so accessible with the way I facilitate the program. Anyone can come up to a drum and tap it and get an immediate sound. Therefore, they can be part of the group – they can contribute. Whether they feel like they have rhythm or not, everybody kind of lands in the same boat. It brings everybody together."

Rhythmic by Nature's next community drum circle is Nov. 21 at 25 Cecil St. in downtown Toronto. The cost is \$10 suggested, or pay what you can.

For more information on Rhythmic by Nature, visit www.rhythmicbynature.com or call Segal at 416-662-6488.

Expressive arts therapist Terri Segal

