



# THE HEALER

## Asbury Park Press

From founding a holistic health counseling center to organizing acts of kindness for the needy, Donna Rita Cetroni's life revolves around helping others feel better

BY **BOBBI SEIDEL** • STAFF WRITER • AUGUST 2, 2008

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Early this year, Alice Latham of Toms River was feeling a bit overwhelmed. Between caring for two young grandsons and her job as a special education teacher, the divorced woman had been unable to keep up with house and property maintenance.

Latham, 59, who also teaches yoga at The Healing Way Center in Lacey, mentioned this to center owner Donna Rita Cetroni, who asked her to send an e-mail with more information.

Latham did and, in May, received a gift: Members of The Healing Way Society — a small, grass-roots nonprofit volunteer group Cetroni formed in 2004 — spent a day at Latham's house. They painted, powerwashed, replaced a fence, planted flowers.

"It was just such a tremendously moving experience," Latham says. "It got me back on track. It put me at a level place where I could maintain the house. Donna is just a wonderful, giving person. Very optimistic, very upbeat. When she's around, you just feel better."

The society is another step on a path Cetroni has been following, one of service to others. For the Toms River registered nurse, that path includes becoming a certified holistic nurse, certified holistic health counselor, and a Reiki energy-healing practitioner and master teacher in the past decade.

The society, which meets quarterly, formed after Cetroni and friends helped a Monmouth County friend who had cancer. They fulfilled the woman's desire to visit Manhattan and held a fundraiser shortly before she died in September 2004. Cetroni's friend Keith Piaseczny, a New York artist who took part, told Cetroni she should form a nonprofit to help others.

"I said, 'I don't have the energy'," says Cetroni, 54, a quality coordinator at Community Medical Center, Toms River, and former emergency room nurse who also was busy with family and with The Healing Way, a holistic, integrative health counseling center in Toms River she had opened that May.

"He said, 'You have to do it.' "

As had begun happening more and more, things fell into place on their own once she agreed, Cetroni says. An attorney friend did the incorporation paperwork at no charge. People volunteered.

"I saw what had happened at the fundraiser, how people came together. It struck me how powerful good will can be," says registered nurse and society member Doreen Esposito, 57, of Toms River. "When we have the opportunity to harness that, it's the perfect opportunity to give back to the community.

"I'm always amazed at Donna's boundless energy, her intuition, her ability to heal," adds Esposito, who also works at Community Medical Center. "I'm very blessed to have her as my best friend."

The society motto is "Neighbors helping neighbors." The core values are "mutual respect, loving kindness, selfless giving, and compassionate wisdom without judgment or prejudice."

The group has two components. Latham's cleanup was part of "Loving Acts of Kindness," which helps Ocean County residents, including donating \$250 to a family whose child has cancer and doing property maintenance for a terminally ill man, Cetroni says.

The second aids the York Street Project in Jersey City, a nonprofit program that helps women and children. "Blankets of Love" provides new blankets blessed by Community Medical Center's chaplain. "Baskets of Love" provides Easter baskets filled with personal needs and toys. "Backpacks of Love" provides backpacks filled with school supplies each August.

The group seeks donations for each project through fliers and e-mails. All money goes to the projects.

"The last board meeting, we didn't have any money in the account, so we passed around the hat," Cetroni says. "Last Christmas, I told people not to give me gifts but to donate money, and I would match it. They gave \$275. I matched it."

Local businesses, including Cool Beans Coffee House in Toms River and Home Depot, have donated materials. Nonmembers have donated time and skills.

Her path, and the practice, center and society, started with Reiki, which she has practiced for 15 years, she says.

"Reiki is a traditional hands-on healing practice that balances energy in the mind, body and spirit — bringing a person to harmony . . . it's a meditative practice," Cetroni says, demonstrating on Esposito in the small, welcoming second-floor office of The Healing Way in Toms River.

Cetroni's first experience with Reiki was when a medical doctor used it to help her with health issues. The doctor suggested Cetroni study Reiki, which has four levels. Cetroni has studied all four twice with different master teachers.

"I'm very grounded in science. I didn't necessarily buy into things I didn't see at first," Cetroni says.

But seeing healing take place in many ways at a Manhattan church where she volunteered after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, changed her thinking, she says. She soon switched from a master's degree program in psychiatric mental health as a nurse-practitioner to holistic health studies at Georgian Court University in Lakewood.

Participating in 2002 in an annual mass Reiki practice in Manhattan parks convinced her to be confident about studying such energy medicine, she says. Then, a hospital patient said, "You have a very healing way about you." Her friend Piaseczny said, "That's the name of your practice!"

"I said, 'What practice?' " she says, but things fell into place for her practice, the society, and in 2007, the Lacey center.

"I have a great deal of respect for Donna because of what she's accomplished in her life," says society member Cherylyn Murphy, 29, of Toms River, public relations director for Holisticare Hospice, Toms River.

"She's a wife, a mother of three. She raised her family while working full time, then went back to school. I don't know how she finds the time to do it, but the fact she finds time to give back to the community is phenomenal. It's something we should all do."

"This isn't me," Cetroni says. "I mean, it is, but it's bigger than me. The synergistic effect of everything that's happened in my life and the people in my life allow me to do my real work, healing. I need to be of service to others."

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# BIO BRIEF

**BORN, RAISED:** Staten Island.

**AGE:** 54.

**EDUCATION:** Associate's degree, nursing, College of Staten Island; bachelor's degree, nursing, Rutgers University; master's, holistic health studies, Georgian Court University; certification, holistic health counseling, Institute of Integrative Nutrition/Columbia University.

**FAMILY:** Husband Thomas, financial manager for a law firm; daughter Lisa Jannarone, 36; sons Christopher, 27, Jonathan, 26; grandson Christian.

**HOBBIES:** Yoga; bicycling; the beach; walking; movies; reading.

**LIFESTYLE:** Daily meditation and yoga; a diet of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, small amounts of fish, dairy or chicken.

**The Healing Way Society:** Donna Cetroni, Dr. Anthony Tamburello, Doreen Esposito, Dr. Russell L. Harrell, Shelley Olson, Cherylyn Murphy, Dr. Leonard DiPisa, Marian Coffey and Tracie Barberi-Matthews, all Toms River; Susan Maglione, Stafford; Gerry Biundo, Lavallette; Suzanne Hart, Lacey.

**Yoga, tai chi, Reiki classes:** The Healing Way Center, (609) 242-4000.

**Holistic integrative health counseling, Reiki:** The Healing Way, (732) 279-1170.

**Volunteering, donating:** The Healing Way Society, (732) 279-1170.

**ON THE WEB [THEHEALINGWAY.ORG](http://THEHEALINGWAY.ORG)**