

Get your chin up

Long Beach entrepreneur is offering anti-aging workouts for a natural face-lift

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A.K. Whitney Staff Writer

CYNTHIA ROWLAND IS A WOMAN ON A MISSION. And that mission, which she embraces with the zeal of a dozen St. Joans, is this: When age starts having its ugly way with your face - - wattling your chin, jowling your cheeks and lining your forehead -- you don't have to resort to the scalpel or injecting silicone or botulin.

Rowland's option is all about exercise -- facial exercise, that is.

For more than a decade, the Long Beach resident has been championing a series of facial exercises marketed under the name ``Facial Magic." Her program is built around 18 exercises done incrementally over nine weeks. Users are asked to do the exercises six days a week, with one rest day. The entire regimen takes about 20 minutes a day, and targets muscles in the cheeks, forehead, chin, neck, jaw and around the eyes. Most involve manipulating the face with gloved hands (for a better grip), and some involve inserting your gloved digits into your mouth. After the nine weeks have passed, exercises are done two or three times a week for maintenance.

When the exercises are done correctly and religiously, along with moisturizing and hydrating, Rowland promises users that many of

age's sins will be corrected, much in the way that crunches can firm your abs or squats tone your glutes.

“If the muscles are in great shape, the look of wrinkles is greatly reduced,” said Rowland, who is such a bundle of energy it is difficult not to get caught up in her zeal as she discusses her favorite subject. “I use my program, and I don't have any sagging. I do my exercises religiously.”

Rowland, by the way, refuses to pin down her own age, but admits she is “almost 60,” and has a 40-year-old son.

And yes, it's hard see any sagging on her face, especially on her forehead, which is so smooth one can't help but mentally accuse her of having sampled just a wee bit of Botox.

That's an accusation Rowland has not only heard before, but denies vehemently. “Strange how people make all these assumptions about you,” she said, adding that toning the muscles in the forehead does the job without toxins, as does being more aware of what kind of facial expressions you often make, such as raising your eyebrows, and curbing them.

Rowland sells her program through a Web site, www.facialmagic.com, and the site is full of testimonials from satisfied customers. There are before and after pictures, and in some, the transformations are quite startling, even to Rowland.

Bernice Untermeyer, for example, had a very prominent double chin. After following Rowland's exercise regime, the double chin was gone. Untermeyer was so delighted with her new look that she got a makeover, lightening and wearing her hair in a more flattering style and changing her makeup. When she sent Rowland her “after” photo, Rowland said she didn't realize it was the same woman at first.

It's the kind of work that makes Rowland feel she may just have been divinely inspired. But like most with a divine mission, Rowland first had to become a convert herself.

It was 1988, and the Enid, Okla., native was in the oil business with her then-husband. The job entailed a lot of international air travel, and Rowland woke up one morning to a horrifying discovery.

“My left eyelid was resting on top of my eyelash,” Rowland said. “It was a major sign of aging.”

So, she did what most women who make such discoveries do.

“I called my girlfriend to complain,” she said.

And she found she wasn't alone.

“A lot of my girlfriends had eye lifts, but a lot of them hadn't had good results.”

And surgery was (and still is) pricey, Rowland added, so she was loath to go that route. Then, she heard about a facial exercise program in Denver that was the equivalent of a nonsurgical face lift, run by a French woman named Marcelle Tschappat (“a real dynamo,” said Rowland), and decided to check it out. Tschappat was able to help Rowland nonsurgically correct her eyelid problem -- and she was hooked.

Tschappat, however, was in her 70s and was dealing with a sick husband, so she decided to retire. This drove Rowland to pick up the mantle.

“I stayed with her to learn this process, and I thought every woman should know about this!”

Thus a mission was born.

In 1990, Rowland moved to California. She began developing her own program, and four years later turned it into a video tape (now a DVD) she would sell through an infomercial as well as in the seminars she would give all over the country. She also developed a line of skin creams, one with the Facial Magic label and another more recent one called Tellurian. She also has a program aimed at plumping lips without using collagen.

One of Rowland's satisfied customers, Los Angeles-area resident Betty Wuliger, who turns 85 this year, says, "As I turned 80, I noticed my face falling a bit. I come from a background of doctors, and they said never have surgery unless it is necessary. My daughter went to one of (Rowland's) seminars (a few years ago), and I started doing the exercises, and I saw a big difference. My face is so firm, and my neck is so good. Most people don't believe me when I tell them how old I am. Of all my friends, I'm the only one who hasn't had surgery."

The Press-Telegram decided to run its own test to see how Facial Magic works, recruiting four people -- two women and two men (yes, Facial Magic is for men, too), ranging in age from the late 40s to mid-60s. Each tester was given Rowland's basic \$60 kit, which includes a DVD of the program, a booklet with further explanation of the exercises, tips for hydration and moisturizing and a place to log results, a pair of cotton gloves and a jar of Facial Magic brand face mask.

Unfortunately, after watching the DVD, the two male testers dropped out immediately, saying that they felt the exercises that kick off the regime seemed too complicated for them. Rowland says the most complicated exercises are indeed at the beginning, one involving sticking your thumbs into your mouth to extend muscles in your upper lip.

“It's like riding a bicycle, I first tell people,” she said.

Nor, does she admit, is it attractive, so you might want to do your exercises in private.

“It isn't a ladylike pose, that's for sure.”

The two female testers, however, saw it through. Marlene, 47, said she didn't think the exercises were difficult at all; they just took some getting used to. Lilie, 65, agreed with that assessment.

Both testers, however, were concerned that they weren't doing the exercises correctly. This was a concern also shared by Wuliger.

“I think I was doing most of the exercises correctly,” she said.

“But I didn't have confirmation.”

Rowland's main advice to clients concerned about whether or not they are doing the exercises correctly is to watch the DVD over and over and over, until you get it. (And if you are still doing it wrong, don't worry -- the exercises won't hurt you, Rowland said.) She also offers private, one-on-one sessions for \$500 and is developing teleconferences and Web conferences for clients with questions. The group conferences would be an extra charge on top of the package fee, and details can be found on the Web site.

Rowland offered to work with the Press-Telegram testers, who discovered they were on the right track and doing the exercises correctly for the most part.

Lilie said that one of the most important things she got from the experience was to touch, like Rowland did, the muscles during the exercise to see if they were contracting. Now on the seventh week of the program, Lilie said her face feels firmer, particularly in the cheek area, and that her husband, who is not one to shower her with insincere compliments, has remarked that she looks better.

Marlene learned immediately that one exercise she thought she was doing right she, in fact, was not. ``It was a minor detail, but it made a big difference," she said.

Also on the seventh week of the program (though she admits to skipping 10 days because of two short ski trips), Marlene said her face looks smoother, less lined, particularly the laugh lines from the nose to the mouth.

Wuliger said being disciplined is indeed the hardest part.

``The difficulty was staying with it," she said. ``It doesn't happen unless you do it."

The main thing is to keep at it, Rowland said, keeping in mind that, like any muscles, the facial ones lose tone if you don't exercise them. But, she warns, if you are expecting to look 21 where you once looked 60, then you will be disappointed. Age, she says, will still have its way with your skin, especially if you have dry skin. That is why, apart from the exercises, Rowland recommends using a collagen-enriched skin cream, drinking lots of water (eight glasses a day) and getting plenty of sleep.

A number of doctors have left testimonials on Rowland's Web site, though Rowland said her program has been met with skepticism by some in the medical community. What people can agree on, however, is that muscles in the face can be toned just like any others, and that, like your abdominals, you can make your face firmer with exercise.

Dr. Ann Vasile, who works at Long Beach's Memorial Medical Center in the unit that helps stroke and palsy patients, is not familiar with Facial Magic. But she has seen firsthand what therapists can do to help a person who has lost function regain mobility, and that often involves doing facial exercises.

“We use it for function, we work on smiling, use devices like sucking on a straw,” she said. “Yes, it can work, coordination improves.”

Licia Paskay, an orofacial myologist in the Los Angeles area, has actually incorporated some of Rowland's exercises in her practice. Orofacial myology is the science of the face and the mouth, and helps those who suffer, for example, from an inability to close their mouths or an inability to keep their tongues from sticking out.

“Exercises for the face are very good,” she said. “They balance the muscles.”

A balanced face, she added, can make a person look better, as can a relaxed one.

And looks, like it or not, can take you far.

“People who look good really make the big bucks,” Rowland said.

But that doesn't necessarily mean having to spend them on surgery or injections to look good when a few exercises will do.