



Heal thyself

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YOUR APPOINTMENT AT ONE Roof is on the calendar. When the day comes, you take a deep breath and step over the threshold with vague trepidation. But your stage fright vanishes in the fragrant comfort, the surprise peace that is One Roof. “People say they feel better as soon as they walk in the door,” says Lin Murphy, who has worked as a life coach at One Roof since it opened three years ago. “This place is very beautiful and welcoming. Not clinical at all.”

From 16 to 20 healers practice in the historic building on Henry Street, across from the Saratoga Springs Public Library, offering alternative treatment or adjunctive therapy. With experts in acupuncture, massage, body work, herbal medicine, physical therapy, clinical psychology and expressive arts therapy, childbirth assistance, life coaching, healing touch, reiki and nutritional consultation, One Roof is the only holistic health center of its kind in the area.

Clinical psychologist Dr. Selma Nemer, the founder of One Roof, is deeply committed to the mission of her staff: alerting clients to the healing capacities of their own bodies. “It’s mind-boggling what we can do for ourselves. One Roof is a place where

One Roof founder Selma Nemer is committed to the holistic healing mission.

From acupuncture to herbal
medicine, look under **One Roof.**

professionals teach people who are hurting how to make it stop, or at least to reduce the pain. We facilitate, but the power resides in the client,” says Nemer.

A former chef, well-known regionally for her cuisine magic, particularly in her popular eatery Eartha’s Kitchen, Nemer was in her forties when she matriculated for her doctorate. Sons Martin and Eric had left home for their own adventures—both now are dads—and she was free to reflect, to give a context to her observations as a restaurateur and as a human being. She also is a gifted painter.

“There’s a psychology to eating, to customers, to the front of the restaurant and the back of it; there’s a psychology to being a

member of the restaurant community, and the city community. Besides, there’s balance and similarity to these impulses: I wanted to satisfy people’s appetites for food, and now for compassion. Both are obvious forms of nurturing,” explains Nemer, who is animated on the subject of being a grandmother but prefers to be described as “ageless.”

Before launching One Roof, Nemer worked as a psychologist at Conifer Park in Glenville, Four Winds Hospitals in Saratoga Springs, Skidmore College and in private practice. During her professional odyssey, she realized that Saratoga Springs needed a holistic healing center, a place she would have wanted to go herself. But between the

dream and opening day was more hassle than healing, as she found herself encumbered with building plans, zoning ordinances, a web site and finding practitioners.

Vital support for the venture sustained her, especially from former massage therapist Kristine Reynolds, who, with Labradoodle Clover at her side, is the administrator at One Roof. For clients, it’s the elegant, gracious, ethereal Reynolds who is the first impression; an uplifting, welcoming melody in the foyer. Other members of the creative team included: Phil Reynolds (Kristine’s husband), a key brainstormer; Lynae Kovatch of Perfect Scents, whose original perfumes infuse the center with alluring fragrances; Frank Laskey, owner of Capital Construction; engineer Jonathan Blumberg; and James Kettlewell, architectural historian and Lafayette Street resident, whose own home overlooks One Roof. Henry Street neighbors applauded the renovations and friends urged Nemer on. Her colleagues trusted the One Roof concept and signed leases. In fact, most of the professionals at One Roof have been there since the beginning.

Caroline Russell Smith, a clinical social worker, says: “I wanted to work somewhere that values a healthy work environment as much as health care, and I believe we are working towards a model of integrated health care that will be accessible and affordable.”

Patients are treated both in individual sessions, and, on request, collaboratively, to meet connected needs. Many people see more than one practitioner. “We are definitely not a spa,” Nemer emphasizes. “Our services lead to healing, not a ‘feel-good’ experience.”

One Roof is versatile. “We can be the sole caregivers, a bridge to or from traditional medicine, or work cooperatively with physicians and other health providers – whatever works best for the patient,” Nemer says. Some programs and services are covered by insurers, and many insurers are considering flexible plans that allow members to seek non-traditional remedies or preventive strategies, so they “stay well,” she says.

The Saratoga Stress Reduction Project, for example, is reimbursed. Based on the international mindfulness and meditation movement founded by internationally celebrated University Of Massachusetts behaviorist Jon Kabat-Zinn, the project explores the mind-body connection, using it to improve one’s life, whether it be to reduce the symptoms of chronic disease or gain athletic prowess.



Mary Kuntz is a massage therapist at One Roof.



Kristine Reynolds is the One Roof office administrator.

Nemer and Smith studied with Kabat-Zinn before they set up the program.

Nemer is pleased with One Roof's reception in the community and by health providers and insurers, who, she says, recognize that her brand of healing is increasingly in demand. She is hopeful that insurers, patients and providers will ultimately acknowledge that stress reduction saves money because "it prevents more serious, chronic sickness that ultimately costs the system more." This said, it's impossible not to prod the elephant in the corner: Why are we so crazy? Why do we need all these stress-reduction treatments in the first place?

According to Nemer, who has set a limit of 35 patients a week despite a growing demand for her services: "We live in a culture that bombards us and traumatizes us. You watch the news—but it's not enough for broadcasters to simply focus on one awful image on the screen. Now there are scrolls on the top, scrolls on the bottom. Human beings go go go, and then they crash. People can't sleep, they can't relax, they can't work, they can't relate to their families. They need meds to sleep and something else to wake up. Technological advances are wonderful on many levels, but we've forgotten how to walk, how to breathe, how to be aware. We

have to turn off the TV, do yoga, and get in touch with our bodies. Who even remembers what it's like to watch the sunrise or close their eyes and listen to beautiful music? Who makes the time to do it? We have beautiful internal landscapes but we don't take the time to look at them."

Nemer is worried that the spike-and-

Health providers recognize that her brand of healing is increasingly in demand.

crash nature of contemporary life heralds an increasingly bipolar culture. Nemer wants to help others discover "an authentic life." At One Roof, "everybody on the staff meditates," she says. This underlines Nemer's belief that to be an effective health center, the individuals on the staff must live healthfully. One Roof providers offer their services to each other, a practice that benefits the individual and familiarizes them with other treatments.

Though some patients are wary of body work, like reiki, Nemer notes: "People can be in such traumatic crisis or suicidal or debilitating depressions that words don't penetrate and can't even be heard. The person may be in shut-down or flight-or-fight survival mode, and this may be externally real or feel real internally. In these moments, getting the person stabilized and safe is foremost. Medication can help lift the person's neurotransmitters to a different threshold so they can be safer and function, but in addition, some form of body work, such as reiki, acupuncture or massage, can remind the central nervous system of physical and emotional safety. Likewise, for body workers, it is very helpful to have a therapist to work with emotional issues that may arise with body work. Memories store in the body as tension, pain and symptoms."

Birthing a holistic health center was neither an easy or natural course for Nemer, a Philadelphia native who lived "an unruly adolescence." She spent time in India, Mexico, Israel, Italy and on various sunny islands before settling in Middle Grove. White-haired, creamy-skinned and lithe, Nemer exudes the vigor and purposefulness of a

hummingbird, gliding through her enchanting home-on-a-hill. She designed her home as a multi-level cottage, with areas that flow into each other. Each space is a soothing, independent room, as energy flows through an archway, up the stairs, behind a curtain or through the window into the garden.

The synchronized fields of energy, at One Roof and in her home, are not coincidental, but emerged from a web woven by Nemer, who laughs and cries easily. Her perceptivity and prescience is legendary among family, friends, professional peers and patients.

"I'm getting everything I can out of all I've got," she says, paraphrasing the name of a book she's just read by marketing wizard Jay Abraham. "I want to do good, feel good, have a good time and be a good person." It's irrelevant that some of the people she cares about are absent from the scene. Nemer sees, feels, and talks to those people in her heart: "This goodness," she tells them. "That's what I want for you, and you, and you too." **SL**

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