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LIFE

Let's call it 'brunch therapy'

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By Sandi Kahn Shelton, Register Staff

If the hard economic times have put some stress and strain into your marriage, maybe you and your mate could use a little brunch therapy.

That's right. Take some time off on a weekend morning and have a cup of self-esteem with that buttery croissant, or add a dash of positive thinking to your sunny-side-up eggs.

That's the idea of the Couples' Cafe, the brainchild of Sharon Massoth of Madison, a licensed psychotherapist, interfaith minister and certified professional coach, who has been working with individuals and couples for 34 years. She's beginning a series of Sunday morning two-hour brunches for up to 12 couples, which include spiritual inspiration, as well as a chance to appreciate each other and learn some tips for coping.


The brunches will take place at Chestnut Fine Foods & Confections at 1012 State St. in New Haven, and there, among the atmosphere of soft jazz, good food and light-hearted inspiration, Massoth hopes she can help couples remember how much they love and treasure each other, and learn some skills for keeping their relationships alive.

"I see how couples get tense with each other in these tough times," Massoth says. "With so much fear around, they start to take it out on each other. People are worried about unemployment and overspending, and they need to come up with creative ways to keep their relationships thriving."

Massoth works with groups a lot, she says, but has found that typically, men aren't as comfortable with introspective work in a group setting. At



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many of her other groups, she says, there will be 20 women, but just one lone man. She's hoping to make this a safe and fun place for men as well as women. "There will be exercises and activities — all very nonthreatening," she says with a laugh. "Men will have buddies there, and, as they know, there's safety in numbers."

Some social science experts have claimed that the recession has made it impossible for couples who wish to separate to do so. Indeed, Massoth says she hears from people all the time about their desire to figure out solutions to their marital problems, rather than separate.

"Couples who are 'on the rocks' are talking openly to me about the fact that divorce would be a financial disaster for them right now," she says. "So rather than let things get to that point, I'm hoping that couples can learn to spend time nurturing themselves and each other. And, with the cost of marriage counseling often being beyond what people can afford, I hope that offering some counseling services in a group, over brunch, will help people preserve this most valuable asset, their marriage."

Massoth decided on offering this at Chestnut after she was telling her friend, Patty Walker, owner of the cafe about her desire to help couples who are struggling. Walker pointed out that the cafe's closed on Sundays, so Massoth could use the whole space for her brunches.

"One of the things that this cafe's known for is the nurturing love they give to their customers, along with the nurturing food," Massoth adds. "Just being in there is like therapy."


Massoth intends to help couples move from a state of fear back into a state of love — for themselves and each other. "I'm going to teach couples how to reconnect with gratitude, through using a gratitude journal. I'll ask them to do couples' outings where they connect with their sense of spirit. I hope these exercises can give them a sense of their greater, more powerful self that is their loving soul."

Some of the topics include ways that women can communicate so that men can hear them, how it is that the law of attraction can create a better relationship and bring about remedies and healing, and how creating one's own happiness is essential for being happy as a couple.

For those who might be reticent, Massoth says that she won't be asking people to disclose to the group anything that would make them uncomfortable. "They can ask questions to me anonymously if they wish," she says, "and there will be time to meet with me privately, as a couple, to talk briefly. Basically, I hope to give them skills they can take back home and use. I'm hoping we can meet every six weeks, and that they can see the progress they can make."

Kara Gagnon of Essex can't wait. She and her husband, John, will be attending the first session, along with several of their friends. Kara has been seeing Massoth both for individual sessions and in group sessions for a year now.

"My husband and I are both working full time and raising children," she says. "I think this is going to be a great way for us to take time out from our chaotic schedules and take some time to think about our



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relationship. Sharon is so intuitive about what's going on, and so incredibly loving and truthful. I know that the men who come to the session are going to be amazed by her insights.”

Contact Sandi Kahn Shelton at sandishelton@comcast.net.

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