

'Y' offers program for health for free

A few years ago, a certain wine school in the Boston area was just limping along. The classes were held in a charming wine cellar, conveniently located and appropriately atmospheric. The proprietor was knowledgeable, funny and down-to-earth. He cooked gourmet food from scratch to accompany the wines, which he presented in a casual, approachable manner. His prices were reasonable, and all who attended learned a lot and had a great time.

Despite all of this, he just couldn't seem to fill all the slots. So he made a radical marketing decision: he doubled his prices. The rest is history.

He's now outgrown his own basement, and operates an extensive business on Commonwealth Avenue. Guest lecturers come from all over the world. Not too long ago, he filmed a wine series for PBS.

The lesson? People tend to associate value with price. If an item is too cheap, we can't

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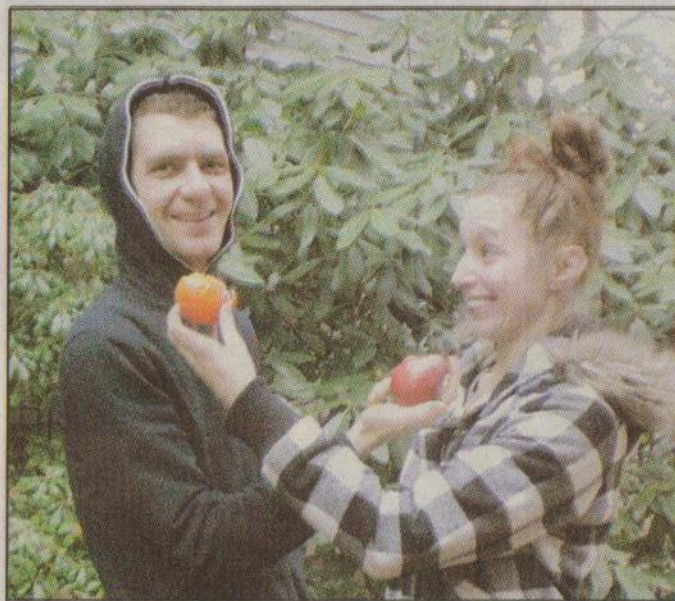
believe it's any good. Make it ruinously expensive, and we think we have to have it.

So what does an organization do when it has something of value to offer, but is forced to give it away? How can it convince people it's worth anything?

The YMCA is taking sign-ups for an eight-week program called Health Smart, to be held in January and February. It's a grant-funded program, so the cost is zero. Members and nonmembers are

welcome. It's perfectly timed for the new year, with its usual resolutions to lose weight and make healthier lifestyle choices. Each meeting includes a delicious meal or snacks. Now let's see if anyone will come!

The Health Smart Behavior Program is an outcome of the Family Health Self-Empowerment Project, a three-year research project which was funded by the PepsiCo Foundation and led by Dr. Carolyn M. Tucker. The project was based on Health Self Empowerment Theory,



submitted photo

Ali-Reza Vahadji and Lindsay Ristaino will be among the participants in the free Health Smart program at the YMCA of Greater Springfield. The program begins on Jan. 5 or 6 at the downtown Y and on Jan. 7 at the Scantioc Valley branch in Wilbraham.

which states that an individual's engagement in Health Smart Behaviors is affected by five variables: health motivation, health self-efficacy, health self-praise, health coping and health responsibility.

During this eight-week program, participants will:

- Learn healthy lifestyle choices
- Learn to be responsible for their own health
- Learn to honor their bodies and choices that reflect their health
- Learn to motivate themselves and their families to maintain long-term health lifestyle changes
- Have a great time, meet

new people and learn about themselves and their community.

Four sessions will be offered, one at the Scantic Y and three downtown. Participants will meet one-on-one with trained facilitators to customize a do-able program for themselves. They'll also meet as a group once a week for socialization and support.

"The program focuses on small, doable changes that people actually can accomplish," said executive director Julie Costello, who's in charge of the program. "For example, let's say we determine together with the person that he or she should

HEALTH SMART

Tuesdays: Jan. 5 to Feb. 23, noon to 1 p.m. (limited to eight participants)

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Wednesdays: Jan. 6 to Feb. 24, 5:30 to 7 p.m.

Thursdays: Jan. 7 to Feb. 25, 4:30 to 6 p.m. (Scantic Valley YMCA)

Dinner or snacks included

be eating more fruit. We won't simply let that person say, 'OK, I'll eat more fruit.' Or even, 'I'll eat fruit twice a week.'

"We'll ask, 'Exactly what fruit will you eat, and when will you eat it?' The person may decide, 'I'll eat a blueberry smoothie at breakfast on Tuesdays and a grapefruit at breakfast on Thursdays.' We'll make her write it down! And on Tuesday morning she'll say, 'OK, I have to eat a blueberry smoothie now.' Those are small, specific, doable objectives."

Education, motivation, support, socialization and free food. No cost; no obligation except to show up and bring a good attitude. Too good to be true? Julie Costello hopes not.

For more information on YMCA programs or how you can get involved, call (413) 739-6951 (Springfield Branch) or (413) 596-2749 (Scantic Valley Branch), or visit www.springfieldy.org