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Kathy Lalikos: Just Call Her Coach

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Now, don't go around in circles even though this distinction might sound a bit confusing: a maze is not a labyrinth, a labyrinth is not a maze—and Kathy Lalikos knows the difference. Though both have interconnected walkways, a maze, she explains, has paths that lead to dead ends, blind alleys, and wrong turns. In a labyrinth, on the other hand, all the turns lead one way—to the center. "A labyrinth is uncursal; you have no choices in where you walk," she explains. The image of the labyrinth, she says, is designed to encourage people to explore different aspects of their own personas. The distinction between a maze and a labyrinth is important to Kathy, who lives in Deep River, because she is preparing a program on labyrinths for a national wellness conference this summer. And she plays on the difference between the two linear forms in her program's title, "Is Your Life Like a Maze? Connect with the Earth's Energy by Walking a Labyrinth." Walking labyrinths, she says, has been a technique for quiet reflection since ancient times. "It's really walking meditation. It's a chance to go inside yourself that's different than just meditating and sitting in a certain way," she says. "I don't sit still well." Kathy also uses the image of the labyrinth as a way of uncovering different aspects of one's inner self in her work as a life coach. She is not only certified to coach others, she's also her own best example of the results of life coaching. Her career, she says, grew out of her own experience with changing the direction of her professional existence. Often she says life coaching is appropriate at times of significant change, such as taking on a new job, or facing an empty nest when children have left home. "Life coaching is not therapy," she says. "The life coach partners with the person to help them find their path. The life coach asks very powerful questions and holds people accountable. The questions are open-ended and the answers are not in me; they are in the person." She recalls the life transition where she assessed what she was doing and what she wanted to do. At the time she was a financial analyst for an insurance company. She realized that though she had been successful in business, she wanted something else. "I wanted to be a teacher," she recalls. At the time she graduated from Russell Sage College in Troy, New York, with a degree in health, Kathy says, it was not usual for schools to employ separate health teachers. Often health class was an added job taken on by physical education teachers. By the time she realized that she wanted to into teaching, for which she had originally trained, Kathy says that health, and health teachers, were a regular part of educational systems. She taught in Rocky Hill for two years and then in Old Saybrook for one year before she realized something else—the students she really wanted to teach were adults. For the past several years, Kathy has taught wellness-focused classes through adult education in Old Saybrook. She has also taught in a program for retired adults in Middletown. Her course titles reflect the challenges to wellness in an angst-filled world: Living Mindfully in the Chaos of Our Daily Lives, Forgiveness, Do it for Yourself; and Thoughts Become the Things...Chose the Good Ones. Kathy and her husband Michael have lived in Deep River for 24 years, where they have raised two sons, now 21 and 18. She has served the Tri-Town Youth Services Board and on the Deep River Board of Education. She admits, given her emphasis on wellness and life coaching, that her Pleasant Street address sometimes inspires disbelief. "People say to me, 'Pleasant Street? You're kidding,'" she admits. An enthusiastic walker whether or not the path is in a labyrinth, Kathy has different routes that take her from Deep River into Essex and Chester. She's also a dedicated gardener; her backyard once contained areas for both vegetables and flowers, though that changed when her sons preempted the vegetable area for a barbecue pit. Kathy says that her own exploration of life's changing paths have convinced her that change, something people often fear, is basic to a healthy existence. "Try something new in your life. What that should be is different for each person. Read a new book, meet a new person. By doing new things we open our eyes to new perspectives," she says. Kathy knows just what that new thing is going to be in her life. She was interested in something she and her husband could do together. "I asked him, 'So, do you want to take dance lessons,'" she says. Kathy reports he is looking for classes now.