

City People

The Greenville News

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Outreach ministries director a 'coach and player,' **Page 4**

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Wednesday, October 1, 2008

e Garrison

Acupuncturist sees 'real way' to make difference in the lives of others



GEORGE GARDNER / Staff

die Garrison, chairman of the Lions Club New Vision Car fundraiser, set for Saturday, hopes the event will raise \$100,000 to help those with vision problems.

It is a rewarding feeling Garrison has enjoyed often in the 26 years she has been a member of the Lions Club, a local organization, which is part of an international organization that has long been a player in a worldwide effort to help

those with vision problems.

In August 2007, the Greenville club joined in that effort with an antique car show that raised (after expenses) about \$6,000.

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By **Abe Hardesty**

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As a child, Marina Ponton enjoyed what a travel lover would consider a storybook life. As her father worked for architectural firms around the world, she lived in South America, Europe, North America and Africa.

But wherever she lived, Ponton wrestled with the same ailments — severe allergy problems, and an immune system that frequently struggled to fight off colds and flu. By the time she earned a communications degree at the University of Miami, the native of Argentina had been diagnosed with chronic fatigue.

"For a long time, doctors thought I might 'grow out of it,'" says Ponton, "but I never did."

At age 21, however, she stumbled across a remedy that proved to be life-changing and career-changing. While working as an agent in the entertain-



PATRICK COLLARD / Staff

Acupuncturist Marina Ponton owns Greenville Natural Health Center, which also offers massage therapy and herbal remedies.

ment industry in New York City, a co-worker who had spent 15 years in China persuaded Ponton to visit a practitioner of Oriental medicine.

"I thought he was crazy,"

See **PONTON** on page 14

ON at The Symphony Tour of Homes
Portabello Way (Lots #126)



765C Haywood Rd.
Greenville 864.458.7144
Tues. - Sat. 10-5

Ponton: Acupuncture became remedy for her ailments

Continued from Page 1

Ponton says, adding that she went to the doctor in the Chinatown community "just to be polite" and because "I was feeling so miserable. I couldn't breathe (well) and I was tired all the time."

Walking toward the back of a crowded Chinatown grocery store, Ponton remembers thinking, "what have I gotten myself into? It was like stepping into another world."

She was greeted by a Chinese man who inspected her tongue and offered an immediate, but vague, diagnosis: "You are a mess."

That changed, she says, within hours.

"I could breathe easily and I was full of energy. It just amazed me," Ponton recalls. "I thought, 'how could do this be? How could a few tiny needles create

PROFILE

■ **Name:** Marina Ponton, practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental medicine.

■ **Family:** Husband Rafael Arena, an electronic engineer with the Sims Group

■ **Education:** University of Miami, American University of Paris, Atlantic Institute of Oriental Medicine,

■ **Interests:** Sightseeing in the western part of the Carolinas

such a huge change so quickly?"

By the 10th treatment, Ponton says she was "a new person," with a new career goal.

"Here I was working in what most people think is the glamorous and fabulous entertainment industry, which really didn't make a difference or substantial contribution in the community," Ponton says.

By contrast, she sudden-



PATRICK COLLARD / Staff

After acupuncture helped her with her allergies, Marina Ponton found her new career path.

ly saw acupuncture as "a real way to make a difference" in the lives of others.

"This simple experience I had completely changed my life. I was really moved to do it as a career," Ponton says.

Three months later, in the fall of 1994, Ponton quit her job, moved back to Florida and entered Oriental medical school.

"It was really the best decision I had ever made,"

says Ponton, who is active as a spokesman for acupuncture as a medical approach that can be integrated with traditional medicine.

Ponton, 35, practiced Oriental medicine eight years in Miami. In October 2006, when husband Rafael accepted a job with a Greenville engineering firm, she closed the practice and started a new one here — with low expectations.

"We really love living here. One of my best friends had relocated here six years earlier, and we knew from visits here that Greenville was a place we'd like," says Ponton. "But I figured it would take a while to build a new practice."

It hasn't taken as long as she thought.

One of eight acupuncturists in Greenville County

and one of 52 in South Carolina, Ponton typically sees 12-18 clients a day, and most of the visits involve acupuncture. Her business, the Greenville Natural Health Center, also offers massage therapy and herbal remedies.

In terms of clients, the center reached its first-year goal in six months and reached its third-year goal in one year. Ponton started the business on Augusta Street, but moved to a larger office on Laurens Road in January 2007.

Typically, the clients come with a high level of curiosity. About 80 percent are women — and the only men who come through the door are usually persuaded to do so by women.

"We never have clients come in off the street — they're always referred here by another client,"

says Ponton.

"This is a medicine that is very different from traditional western medicine. Men are more skeptical," says Ponton. "But once they make the leap, men tend to become very loyal clients."

One of them, Will Schilling, a Greenville Tech instructor, has been visiting about once a month for two years for acupuncture treatments that seem to control allergies and reduce the frequency of back pain.

"I don't know what it's going to help, but I know it's going to help something," says Schilling.

The comments naturally bring a big smile from Ponton.

"I love what I do. I'm really lucky to have a job that is so rewarding. I never know what the next patient will have."

2008
Symphony Tour of Homes
European Charm in Cobblestone
October 3 - 5
Friday and Saturday 10am - 4pm
Sunday 1pm - 4pm

ADVANCE TICKET LOCATIONS
Barbara's Hallmark
University Square Fairview Road

Fall Special
Book 2 Days...
Get 3rd Day 1/2 off!!

2008
FESTIFALL
WALNUT GROVE PLANTATION
Saturday, October 4
10:00 am to 5:00 pm
Re-enactment at 11:00 am
Sunday, October 5
10:00 am to 4:00 pm
Re-enactment at 1:30 pm

Enjoy a day of history as it comes to life at Walnut Grove Plantation. Recapture the past by participating in basketry, blacksmithing, candle dipping, doll making, dyeing, woodworking, soap making, spinning, weaving and a wide variety of colonial skills demonstrated by craftsmen in period clothing.

Youngsters will enjoy playing early games, dipping candles, and writing with a quill pen. Each day, Revolutionary war re-enactors will relive the 1780 attack on Walnut Grove Plantation. More than 100 re-enactors will make Walnut Grove Plantation home this weekend.