

Cardio Crazy!

Andre Hairston's Cardio Craze Is For Everyone

TEXT BY KATHY BUCKLEY PHOTOGRAPHY BY GERIN CHOINIERE

When you first walk into Andre Hairston's cardio class, you immediately feel at ease. The gymnasium is filled with people of all sizes, shapes, ages and abilities. Some are cut and coordinated, while others are just beginning their fitness journey.

When Andre jumps onto the platform, the fun begins. His voice is deep, and his moves are smooth. Music fills the air, and the people dance without stopping for one hour, following Andre's every move. No boring repetitions or clock watching here – this class is a blast, and the time flies by. You come away soaked with sweat and wanting more.

As a little boy, Andre would dance with his mother, brothers and grandmother to songs by Earth, Wind & Fire and Kool & the Gang. Years later when his mother suffered a stroke, he was inspired

to encourage others to live a more healthy lifestyle. He knew that working out prevents disease and sought a fun and exciting way to help people live longer. Although his mom did not exercise, she loved music, and she loved to dance. "She would have loved Cardio Craze," he said. His beloved mother passed away a few days before Christmas last year.

Andre Hairston held his first Cardio Craze class over six years ago on Super Bowl Sunday at the Harris YMCA in Charlotte. He had previously enjoyed Zumba classes with teacher Julie Swanson, whose mother pointed out that he could "shake it pretty well." That sparked the idea to teach a fun, "guy-friendly" cardio class, which he branded Cardio Craze. Since then the class has grown from 39 to over

80 students in each of seven classes held weekly at Cornwall Center in Myers Park, the Morrison YMCA and Fitness Connection in Ballantyne and Indian Trail. There is no membership fee, only \$5 at the door.

Andre's Cardio Craze classes are diverse and inclusive, with participants ranging in age from 5- to 84-years-old. The songs are fast and funky favorites that make all ages want to dance. "Music is the universal language," says Hairston. His students learn to dance like Michael Jackson, with some hip hop moves, the jive, the salsa and the wobble mixed in. The class is so much fun, you forget about the intense cardio workout that is happening.

PURE INSPIRATION

Although the music is exciting, the people in Andre's classes are the real inspiration. It does not matter if they can dance or not, each person has his own moves and attitudes to express. We laugh and grin at each other when our inner-Beyoncé comes out, and the pure joy is contagious. Andre inspires us, and we inspire each other.

My good friend and five-year class attendee Debbie Williams had told me about her fun cardio class, which I assumed would be far too advanced for me. She is in excellent shape and raves about Cardio Craze. "I have been going to Andre's classes for over five years and have so much fun that I forget I am getting a total body workout! His classes are great stress-relievers, too!"

Charlotte Living Home Editor Vicki Payne had also invited me to her cardio class where you can dance with wild abandon, and nobody cares. Finally when my niece Wendy Mauney and her husband David mentioned their awesome



CARDIO CRAZE AND MORE

Andre Hairston takes Cardio Craze on the road and offers free classes to Boys & Girls Clubs in other cities. The kids at Camp Kemo in South Carolina say Cardio Craze is their favorite activity at the camp.

You won't find Andre dancing in Charlotte's night clubs, but you may see him on television or the stage. His passion is acting, and he appeared in *Homeland* for two years when the show was filming in Charlotte, as well as a stage production of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Along with his acting career, he will continue to help save lives by challenging his students to have fun and work out.

No matter what you're going through, dancing for joy is good for the soul. Andre Hairston's Cardio Craze is good for the heart and everything else. Check it out, and you'll be hooked, too. *

For more information visit AndreHairston.com and follow Andre Hairston on Facebook.



To Kill A Mockingbird and Cardio Craze class photos courtesy of Andre Hairston.

surgeries. Kasandra's hair is growing back now, and her Facebook posts are full of encouragement. She is grateful to Andre for his inspiration. "Had it not been for Andre and Cardio Craze for the last 6+ years, I'm not sure where I would have found my outlet. He's my superhero coach and the closest thing to a papa that I have here in NC," she said.

Andre's classes are full of survivors and overcomers. Some committed class members have lost over 100 pounds. There are at least 12 cancer survivors in the group. This baby boomer has overcome an aversion to working out, and in just a few months, has a smaller waistline and dress size to prove it, not to mention the benefit of feeling better.

cardio class, I was intrigued and showed up at Cornwall Center one Saturday morning. I have been hooked ever since. When *Hello, Good Morning* began to play on my first day of class, WBTV anchor Brigida Mack and a young woman jumped onto the platform and began dancing with Andre. Their moves were so cool that I barely noticed Kasandra Hegwood's bald head and t-shirt with the word, "Hope". Since then, I love to watch them and follow their crazy-cool moves. If you start to feel tired in Andre's class, just look around, and someone will lift you up with their energy.

Kasandra Hegwood just turned 30 and has been battling breast cancer since August 2014. She is a wife and mother of three, sings in the church and works out like crazy in Andre's classes. Her positive energy and stamina in class offer no clue that she faces four more months of chemotherapy and two