

Frederick Griffith and Anew Fitness Helping Seniors with Beneficial Exercise

by David Schmit



Frederick Griffith was living in Houston in 2017 when his mother asked him to return to his hometown of New Orleans. So Griffith resigned from his restaurant manager position, pulled up stakes, and returned home. His mother had always been there for him, raising four children as a single mom, and, as Griffith puts it, “I never wanted for anything.”

Little did he know then that his mom, Anna Hampton, was giving him yet another gift, one that put him on his life’s journey.

“I always knew I wanted to help people. But working with my mother allowed me to target who those people were and how I could assist them,” says Griffith, now the owner of Anew Fitness. His facility provides fitness training for older adults, especially low-income Black seniors. Anew Fitness partners with numerous senior organizations, including the New Orleans Council on Aging, the New Orleans Recreation Department, Clover New Orleans, and the AARP.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FREDERICK GRIFFITH

Griffith had only been back in town about a month when his 66-year-old mom stubbed and cut her toe. Usually, that's not a big issue, but in this case, when the cut became infected, she didn't go to a doctor. Why? Because she was in a low-income bracket. And although Anna Hampton always made sure her children never went without, she didn't apply that same philosophy to herself.

Without regular checkups, Hampton never knew she had diabetes, and soon, the infection became so bad that she could no longer walk. Diabetes weakens the immune system, and the ability to fight off infections, and that small cut led to high blood pressure and kidney failure, and she was rushed unconscious to the hospital.

Looking back, Griffith says that his mother's ailments weren't unusual.

"High blood pressure, diabetes, and heart problems are pretty common in the Black community, and because she was poor, she couldn't afford to take care of it," Griffith says.

Doctors decided to amputate her toe and eventually had to remove the foot and leg to just below the knee.



"From that day forward, I became her caretaker," Griffith says.

Griffith brought his mom back to her Lower 9th Ward home, making alterations

to the apartment to accommodate her disability. He also began adjusting his career path.

Having worked in the restaurant industry for many years, Griffith wanted a change, and he diligently studied for many months to earn his personal training certification from the American Council of Exercise (ACE). Armed with his certificate, Griffith became a kickboxing instructor.

His focus, however, remained with his mother. She appeared frail and not her formerly active self. Griffith paid strict attention to her physical therapy visits – noting how they used resistance bands and furniture as functional exercise equipment. One day, after the therapist left his mom's apartment, his mom exclaimed, "That was easy. I could do more."

"I thought to myself, 'Yes, you can,'" Griffith recalls. "The PT had been helpful, but insurance would only pay for limited visits, so it was time for me to step in for my mother."

Griffith developed a fitness plan for his mom using his trainer's knowledge and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FREDERICK GRIFFITH



what he had observed. With the COVID-19 pandemic hitting New Orleans, Griffith was unemployed, and that provided the time he needed to work daily with his mom and create standardized training techniques for older adults. These included strength training with resistance bands, light wrist weights for shoulder raises, chair stretches, couch sit-ups, and more.

“She became more independent and more of the mom I knew,” Griffith says. “What I realize now is that my mom was still teaching me. She was giving me my life’s path.”

When the world reopened post-pandemic, Griffith became a Planet Fitness trainer. He brought something uniquely different to the group classes he taught – specializing in working with middle-aged to older adults. Soon, his classes were packed, and one of his regulars was Alex Dunn.

“Frederick is talented and innovative, and he had me doing things I’d never done before, like step-ups, resistance training, and using exercise balls,” Dunn says. “He had already set up his business, Anew Fitness, and I knew he could take it to the next level by leaving Planet Fitness. Plus, he

would be a great asset for so many seniors in the Black community with high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart problems.”

In his late 60s, Dunn is a connector. As a lifelong New Orleanian who has been involved in politics and community organizing for many years, there are few people that Dunn doesn’t know in this city. He took the initiative and set up a meeting for Griffith, himself, and officials from the New Orleans Council on Aging.

After a brief introduction at the meeting – “I am Frederick, and I offer fitness” -- Griffith was out of his chair, walking the room, talking about his senior program. Then, Dunn began showing the results: demonstrating exercises, stretching, and touching his toes. The directors were sold, and Anew began an ongoing partnership with the local senior centers, providing weekly fitness classes.

Director of Multicultural Outreach and Engagement for AARP of Louisiana, Linneda McIver, was also at that meeting, and she, too, saw Griffith’s potential.

“Frederick knows how to communicate with older adults, and I really needed someone who could keep people engaged and fit,” McIver says. “With Anew Fitness,

we started the online program ‘Turn Up Thursdays,’ and now we’re entering into the partnership’s third year.”

These partnerships, which will soon include the New Orleans Recreation Department, have convinced Griffith that you can do what you love and make a living from it. Although his mother passed away in 2022 from cancer, he remains grateful that she witnessed the beginning of his success.

He recalls, “She saw what I did with AARP, leading exercises at Senior Fest, and many things I did that led me here. When she died, I thought about quitting, but I had to think about the people I was helping. That kept me going.”

Nowadays, Griffith and Anew Fitness keep progressing. He wants to take his company and its commitment to seniors to a national level, and he recently named Dunn as an Anew Fitness Ambassador. He still feels his mother’s presence in his life and continues to experience her blessings.

“I am so lucky. She may be gone, but my mom left so many angels in place,” he fondly states.