

Veteran massage therapist has hands worth \$5 million

□ Celebrities just some of her clients over last 31 years

By Helen Dolik

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She has \$5 million hands and an appointment book that reads like a Who's Who.

She's let her fingers do the walking over presidents, royalty, TV stars and Olympians.

The Kennedys, Reagans, Nixons, Prince Charles, Princess Diana and Bob Hope were among massage therapist Myk Hungerford's clients.

Hungerford, a 69-year-old great grandmother with a doctorate in physical therapy and 31 years in the business, is in Calgary from California teaching a five-day sports massage workshop at the Northwestern School of Massage.

Calgary is familiar territory to Hungerford, who worked on some of the world's best athletes at the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics.

She supervised 55 massage therapists at the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics and this is her 10th year with the Ironman Triathlon in Hawaii. She's been called the "Mother of Sports Massage."

QUICK FACTS

Tips for choosing a massage therapist:

- Does therapist hold a current licence, and are they a member of their professional association?
- Does therapist ask questions about problem areas or get a case history?
- Does therapist ensure proper draping with towels or sheets? (Patient should be covered except for part being worked on.)
- Can therapist provide documentation of training, such as certificate from an accredited school?

She has a binder full of thank you letters that could wallpaper a room.

Her clients include physical therapy, chiropractic, neurology and orthopedic "rejects." She's the person to see before going under the knife or if told that you've got to live with the pain.

Hungerford's response is "let's try and see." More than 90 per cent have cancelled their scheduled surgery.

"I am not a healer," said Hungerford, who owns the American Institute of Massage Therapy in Costa Mesa, Calif. and is president of the International

Sports Massage Federation. "The only healer I know died 2,000 years ago.

"It is the techniques that work."

Hungerford, who has trained and lectured around the world, has mastered 30 types of massage therapy.

The average massage therapist knows about three types.

She advocates listening to the patient — having a "big ear" — and saying "pain is your gain."

Massage therapy is the third fastest growing profession in the U.S., she said.

"My purpose is to leave a legacy of knowledge to sports massage of the future," said Hungerford, who has written the book *Beyond Sports Medicine*.

Since Hungerford's hands are her livelihood, they're insured for \$5 million. She does finger and

hand exercises, and pampers them with weekly plunges into paraffin wax — seven coats.

She studied piano for 12 1/2 years in her youth so massage came easily to her.

Not even five-way bypass heart surgery could slow her down.

Twelve days after the operation in 1991, she was supervising massage therapists at the Orange County marathon.