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## Dan River Region residents transform thinking about fitness

By Tara Bozick



Mountain River Physical Therapy in Chatham serves as “ground zero” for a movement test gaining international attention.

That’s where physical therapist Gray Cook houses Functional Movement Systems, a fitness consulting business that’s stepping up efforts to reach people about the importance of establishing a baseline of basic movement to optimize workouts and prevent injuries.

Most recently, the Atlanta Falcons’ director of athletic performance Jeff Fish and head trainer and physical therapist Marty Lauzon stopped at the office in Chatham to continue education and improve their efforts.

The Falcons and other teams in the NFL have been using the seven-part Functional Movement Screen developed by Cook and Lee Burton, Averett University’s director of athletic training.

“The overall development of the player has been improved tremendously. We’ve seen a huge reduction in injuries through the years with it,” Fish said. “All of that combined within the system of being able to assess players and individualize workouts has been a tremendous asset.”

The Falcons are one of the teams with the lowest numbers of player-missed practices and games, Fish said. He brought the screen to the team about four years ago after using it with the Oakland Raiders for four years.

A lot of times, athletes have hidden a weakness, like one side of the body overcompensating for the other. The screen and corrective exercises help reset the body, which then continues helping in the regular workout.

It also helps measure if an injured player is ready to return to the game, Lauzon said.

Correcting the way athletes move also helps them feel better, like back or knee pain finally going away, Fish said.

Cook and Burton developed the screen after noticing how many kids were getting hurt playing football. They brainstormed with colleagues at Rehabilitative Services of Danville and the seven tests were born. They used local athletes and high schoolers to refine the information.

Reebok heard about the new screening and gave it a national platform by sponsoring Cook's lectures, including to a NFL coaches combine. The Indianapolis Colts took it on and eventually it gained popularity within professional and college sports.

"It just started gaining traction within the sports medicine industry," Burton said.

From there, it became popular among personal trainers. Lately, the screening has been useful in reducing injury and costs for occupations like firefighters, Cook said.

Military special forces, specifically Navy SEALs Team 6, which tracked down Osama bin Laden, also do the tests, Burton said.

Earlier this week, Cook appeared on the "Golf Fitness Academy" on the Golf Channel.

Burton speaks internationally, especially as the screen gained popularity among European soccer clubs. Because the Functional Movement Screen became mainstream within the past few years, the business is now focused on certifying people to conduct the tests. Worldwide, 5,000 people are certified, Burton said.

Additionally, more use, especially in a controlled, measurable environment like a NFL team, helps give measurable results, which Burton and Cook use to refine the corrective exercises for certain movement weaknesses. The screen started appearing in industry journals.

"It's ever evolving," Fish said.

The screen is meant to be a complement to other tests, and does not determine athletic capacity. Fish believes incorporating the screen into the training program could extend players' careers and ultimately protect investment in players.

"At the end of the day, movement will define anyone's career, any sport," Fish said.

For more information, visit [functionalmovement.com](http://functionalmovement.com) or [www.mountainriverpt.com](http://www.mountainriverpt.com). Like "Functional Movement" on Facebook.