



LOCALS IN *Motion*

Group fitness challenges help energize
and reduce failure in reaching goals.

In 1835, France's **Alexis de Tocqueville** described America as a nation of joiners, noting groups would form "whenever Americans developed the urge to accomplish something." That same fervor for creating alliances is alive and well in America's desire this January to be fit and healthy—and with good reason. We thrive on support and encouragement, mixed with a bit of competition to make it interesting.

"People want to feel connected, and group exercise allows for that to happen," says **Orlando**-based personal trainer **Erin Volz**. "The group dynamic creates a fun, friendly, competitive energy that is hard to match when working out solo." She adds that people tend to push themselves more in a group than they would if they were working out alone.

"Group workouts help you stay committed. You certainly don't want to let your workout buddies down, nor will you let them skip a workout."

Ben Saperia, who owns Saperia Fitness in **Windermere**, agrees. "The most feedback I receive from members is the sense of community and camaraderie. They energize each other, and they thrive

on the encouragement they get from one another." He says while 60 percent of his members are enrolled to lose weight, others are seeking to maintain their physique, while some are fighting cardiovascular issues, such as high blood pressure.

A graduate of the Australian Institute of Fitness in Spain, Saperia opened his gym in 2011. A new fitness challenge is posted on a large whiteboard each month, and the members work toward that goal. Ribbons are awarded to those who reach those goals. Competition is ongoing, he notes, brought on by members themselves.

Swim for Success

On Lake Cane in **Windermere**, a different kind of fitness challenge takes place six days a week. **Dr. Lucky Meisenheimer**, chief of the dermatology division at Orlando Regional Medical Center, opened access to the lake on his property in 1989 for people who like to swim for exercise. The Lucky Lake Swim was born.

The one-kilometer swim across the lake and back is not for the faint of heart. There are no lifeguards or rescue boats. Nonetheless, as many as 150 peo-

ple make the swim daily in the warmer months; die-hards swim year-round, including Dr. Meisenheimer, who swims every day unless he is sick or out of town.

"Most people like to come out to swim for fitness and not in a race environment," says Dr. Meisenheimer. "The big deal is they get to sign the back wall of my house [if they finish]. There are thousands and thousands of names." The always free, cult-following experience that now attracts people from all over the world, gives people a chance to stay healthy and make some new friends.

"There is a social nature to it," he believes. "Group exercise is absolutely the way to go."

For those looking for added competition and recognition, the Lucky 100K Club requires 100 over-and-back crossings of the lake. There is no time limit, and when you finish, you receive a 100K hat and are immortalized with a halo of yellow around your name.

Like the Lucky Lake Swim, **Windermere Roadies**, which denotes itself as "friends, training partners, racing adversaries, and associates in insanity who meet several times a week to punish each other," is an unofficial entity. It also started small with just a few people showing up to ride bicycles together. Once a website was established, the concept grew into four scheduled and mapped-out rides, attracting as many as 150 people on Sundays, its most popular day.

"We are a combination of all the official riding groups," Roadie spokesman **Manny Otero** explains. "Many of them are racers, some professionals, and a lot of tri-athletes from all over the state. Some are people just looking for a group activity." Otero also receives a steady stream of emails from men and women representing all walks of life who just want to start riding and get some exercise. And although it's not a race, mini-contests can and will arise.

"There is always some kind of competition between riders," he says. "It's always better to ride with people who can push you."

Get Fit Club

Not only can group fitness challenge you and help you from making excuses,





COURTESY OF DR. LUCKY WEISSENER

As many as 150 people participate in the Lucky Lake Swim daily.

it can also lead to friendship and a better life. **Tim Gross** and **Nancy Pfaff** of **Dr. Phillips** remain friends two years after competing in WKMG's (Channel 6) Get Fit Club. The fitness challenge brought together local residents who wanted to lose weight, eat well and reduce health problems.

Gross, 45, who hadn't worked out since he was younger, lost 52 pounds during his six-month odyssey with the Get Fit Club. He is now a regular at his local YMCA where he has fostered even more friendships.

"Working out with a group is not only fun, you become like a family," he points out. Gross is poised to meet even more new people—he recently joined a running club at the YMCA as he continues to broaden his new-found attraction to group fitness.

Pfaff, who was down and out due to losing her job, being overweight and sedentary, says the group dynamic in the Get Fit Club was a life saver.

"I was so depressed I couldn't get out of bed," she recalls. Her friends intervened and helped her get in the Club

so she could compete against others who were also in need of getting fit. She says the encouragement, "especially when you felt like giving up," was the reason she made it through the regimen. "It was an experience I will never forget," she says. "It was a gift."

It also turned her life around. Now at age 54, she, like Gross, is a regular at the Dr. Phillips YMCA, and she gets inspiration from the occasional 500-pound man or someone with a prosthetic leg. "You see them still trying, and you think 'and I thought I was having a bad day.'" Pfaff also found a job that truly makes her feel fulfilled each day: She's a nurse with Hope Team, an organization that cares for the men, women and children in homeless camps.

"Being part of a group and working toward a common goal of health and wellness can give you the strength and commitment needed to reach your goals," adds Volz. "As a team you will make new friends, inspire, motivate and support each other to ensure that everyone is successful—and also have a blast doing it!" **L**

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For more group fitness challenges, visit our website at CentralFloridaLifestyle.com.