



# Pumping up strip malls

Clients say they enjoy the privacy of fitness franchises



**NORTH COUNTY** — Strip malls, home to the convenience-store, hair-salon, check-cashing kind, have gained another retail regular in recent years: fitness centers.

From women-only circuit-training gyms to co-ed personal training studios, retail centers have embraced the growing franchises with an all-in-one approach.

“The reason they’re having such success is there is a need, a desire, for their facilities and they’re providing a product people like,” said Encinitas resident Todd Galati, spokesman for the American Council on Exercise.

Just what is it that draws customers to the compact gyms that have forgone fancy juice bars and locker rooms for no-frills resistance training equipment?

Fitness fanatics and eager amateurs have passed up the mega-sized, 24-hour, fully equipped health clubs for the same reason guests pay \$400 a night to stay at the Four Seasons: they crave more “me” factor.

From the sound of their name called when they walk through the doors to the way personal trainers memorize their routines, members of North County’s smaller health clubs and personal training studios say they would rather exercise at small health clubs than become another number at larger chains.

San Marcos resident Sydney Salt, 56, said she typically exercises with three or four others at Workout Express, a 30-minute co-ed interval training circuit located at 317 S. Rancho Santa Fe Road, where she’s gotten to know the regulars.

“I wanted a smaller environment for myself,” Salt said. “I just don’t like being in a place with lots and lots of people.”

Salt said she appreciates the health club’s camaraderie, cleanliness and lack of pressure.

“It’s not just a certain age group — I’ve seen people in here 15 to 70 or 80 years old,” she said.

Fitness Together, a personal training studio franchise with locations in La Costa, Carlsbad and Vista, pairs personal trainers with clients in private workout rooms.

“I’ve heard some gyms say, ‘This is your trainer today,’” said Christine Burke, certified personal trainer and owner of Fitness Together at 1688 S. Melrose Drive in Vista. “It really can slow your progress.”

Rosi Weisser, 56, of Escondido, gets help with stretching from Fitness Together trainer Jon Carroll Friday during Weisser’s workout.

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Sydney Salt,  
San Marcos resident



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## Tips for exercise success:

- Choose activities that are fun, not exhausting. Add variety.
- Wear comfortable, properly fitted footwear and comfortable, loose-fitting clothing appropriate for the weather and the activity.
- Find a convenient time and place to do activities.
- Use music to keep you entertained.
- Surround yourself with supportive people.
- Don't overdo it. Do low- to moderate-level activities, especially at first.
- Keep a record of your activities.
- Reward yourself at special milestones.

Source: American Heart Association

Rosi Weisser, 56, of Escondido, has been training with Fitness Together five days a week for 12 weeks as part of a local TV station's fitness contest.

"I just have to get up and do it," Weisser said. "I didn't do anything except walk my dog."

Personal training studios like Fitness Together have filled a special niche in the industry. Trainers-turned-entrepreneurs are recruiting the kind of customers who prefer heightened attention and a more private setting. They're also bringing more to the table.

"You're probably going to find people with higher level certificates in education with the one-on-one personal training studios," Galati said.

Customers typically see greater results training one-on-one than by themselves, he added.

"It's a lot better to get specialized attention in exercise the same as it is to get specialized attention in the medical industry," he said.

The thought has struck a cord with more than 4 million women who have joined Curves for Women, the 30-minute circuit-training gyms popular with women looking to get fit.

Since its inception in 1992, more than 9,000 franchises have opened worldwide. "It's a place for the average woman to go where she won't be intimidated," said Barbara Rapisarda, owner of Curves for Women in San Marcos, 997 W. San Marcos Blvd. The health club, now saturated in shades of red in honor of Valentine's Day, celebrates major holidays by decorating its walls. "It's just kind of warm and inviting," Rapisarda said.

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## DIRECTIONS

