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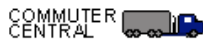
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**Business****Working Out Well in Torrington**

By: John Torsiello

01/24/2008

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### It's a rainy, chilly Friday morning. But inside Energy Fitness on East Main Street in Torrington the atmosphere is comfortable as several dozen individuals work up a sweat.

Some are on state-of-the art treadmills and stair climbers, all equipped with their own television monitors. Others are in the weight training area, pumping iron or working on the Paramount machines. Those gathered in this communal pursuit of fitness are a mixed lot, both in age and gender.

Eric Claman, owner of Pinewoods Health and Racquet Club in the Burrville section of Torrington for over 20 years, opened Energy Fitness two months ago. The 10,000-square-foot center was once home to 20 bowling alleys operated as part of Sky Top Lanes. Twenty bowling lanes still remain in use in the other half of this large building, and the floor in Energy Fitness pays homage to the fact that the club's area once thundered with the sound of bowling balls smashing into pins.

"We thought it would be great if we could keep the surface of the alleys," said Mr. Claman, who invested around three quarters of a million dollars into the facility with plans for additional spending on new machines and expansion into a 4,000-square-foot second floor room. "It's beautiful wood and it retains a bit of the flavor of the bowling alley, which is a nice touch." And an attractive one. You can still see dark spots on the golden floor where pins were once set.

Mr. Claman contracted Borghesi Building and Engineering Company of Torrington to undertake renovations to the space, which is open, airy, well lit and climate controlled. Great care was taken to make every detail imbue the facility with a sense of comfort for members, while at the same time maximizing floor space to incorporate as much workout equipment as possible without crowding.

In the "cardio" area there are a dozen treadmills, eight Elliptical machines that have elevation options, four Tread Climbers, two Step Mills and four somewhat magical exercise bikes that more resembled video games than traditional stationary bikes that we once pumped away at until boredom finally overtook the senses.

"It was very important that we have enough equipment so that people don't have to wait to get on a machine," said Mr. Claman, as he took a visitor on a tour of the facility. "One of the things that drives me crazy when I work out on a machine is the monotony of traditional equipment. Our machines have their own televisions that are hooked up to cable. You can use it or not, it's your call."

Mr. Claman's smile widened as he showed off his Espresso Fitness stationary bicycles that have, as they say, all the bells and whistles. The bikes have a video monitor that puts the user onto various routes, racing against animated characters or through courses where points are awarded for hitting targets on along the way and climbing slopes of varying degrees.

"Every time you use the bike you punch in your code and it automatically remembers your previous uses," said Mr. Claman as he climbed onto a bike and cycled past animated figures on an oval track displayed on the monitor. "You can race against yourself and other riders that are displayed."

He added, "I was working out on this bike the other day and getting into the game on the monitor. Before you know it I was on for 40 minutes and was dripping sweat. I really think a machine like this where there is a strong interactive or game element is the future of fitness. It takes the boredom out of the process."

All these new age fitness machines are also a way to entice members into the facility and keep them coming back.

"We wanted this to be somewhere where you can come in for a half hour and get a great workout and be stimulated. You can spend 20 minutes on cardio, 15 minutes on the strength training equipment and be out of here. Or you can stay two hours if you like."

Energy Fitness also has four "Adaptive Motion Trainers" that allow the user to adjust for the type of body motion he or she wants to employ. It can either be a stair climbing movement or a gliding maneuver. The treadmills incline as do the stair



climbers, which allow the user to push the exercise to the maximum if they so desire. There are four lines of strength training equipment at the facility, all arranged in such a way to allow for safety and security while creating an area where conversation can flow freely.

Mr. Claman reported total membership of around 1,200 people with about 56 percent of that number being women. The club's main demographic is the 35-to-60-year-old age group.

"It was very important that we made this a place where women don't feel intimidated," said the operator. "It's a nice atmosphere, it's clean, we have fabulous equipment and we are very modestly priced. We have certain rules about dress and decorum, like no jeans or work boots in the strength training area."

Membership is only \$34 a month, and for another \$10 a month individuals can gain access to the fitness area at Pinewoods. "We call that the platinum membership," said Mr. Claman. "We have about 80 people at that level."

He said, "We thought that we might lose a lot of members from the fitness center at Pinewoods once we opened here. But we lost only 18 members. I think people like having the option of using one or both."

Said Torrington's Mike Bakunis as he left the sparkling men's locker room, "I've been a member since it opened and it's a fabulous place. "The equipment is top notch and the facility is always clean and comfortable."

Albert Corpus serves as the facility's general manager and Laura Thibault and Laurie Anderson its assistant managers.

"We have seen parents and their kids working out together," said Mr. Corpus, "and you don't see that at a lot of gyms. We have a diverse membership, from older women to the serious lifters. It all works together."

Eight personal trainers are connected with Energy Fitness for personalized service, said Mr. Claman. There are also three tanning beds, an on-line pro shop where members can order apparel and equipment, and Noujaime's Specialty Foods of Torrington stocks a supply of sandwiches and salads that are available in a small cooler near the front desk.

Mr. Claman said members come from throughout Litchfield County and as far away at Waterbury, Canton and Sandisfield, Mass.

"We like to think Energy Fitness is a facility that the people of the Torrington area deserve," observed Mr. Claman. "We're raising the bar for fitness centers just like some of the new restaurants and shops are doing elsewhere in Torrington. It's a great location right on East Main Street and we have plenty of parking."

Mr. Claman expects there to be some synergy between his facility and Sky Top Lanes, which also has a lounge, a small snack area and a video arcade. Sky Top is owned by the Dedominics family, which is leasing the space in which Energy Fitness is located to Mr. Claman.

"I think it is a nice combination of things under one big roof. Whether or not there is some spillover from one to the other is yet to be seen. But I can't imagine it will hurt having both operations under one roof."

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