

Following through on resolutions

By **MARTIN J. KIDSTON - Independent Record - 03/08/08**

Members of the ultra cardio class trickle in with gym bags slung over their shoulders, the makings of a wry smile building upon their faces.

In past years, those who joined the club around New Year's with lofty dreams of physical health and a trimmer physique have quit and gone home, returning to old habits.

This year, however, things are different.

More than 60 days after New Year's, that fateful day of resolutions and self-made promises, the gym is still a hopping place. Treadmills churn and weights clank.

Would-be "biggest losers" are working hard to take off pounds.

"In all honesty, this is the first year I haven't seen a huge drop-off in February," said Anneliese Smith, a group instructor at the Broadwater Athletic Club. "Usually, by mid-February, the class size returns to normal. But sometimes I still run out of equipment, and I still see new faces."

Smith catches a breath following her strenuous midday class, one set to a thumping beat fit for a midnight rave. This year's goals are the same as those set in past years — lose weight and start a new routine.

For nearly 10 years, Smith has motivated others to change their ways. During that time she's heard all sorts of stories and even more excuses.

But this year, Smith believes people are working harder to keep their health-minded resolutions deeper into the season. It's not a verifiable fact, just a feeling the veteran trainer gets when watching others in her classes.

"I love seeing the classes packed and people fighting for equipment," she said. "The importance of good health is finally getting out there."

Donna Amaro got the message several months ago. She once weighed 230 pounds and admits to having had a weight problem since high school. Even when she started going to the gym, the results she envisioned rarely came.

"We pay to come here, but we don't always see the results," Amaro said, catching a breather in the weight room. "Having a trainer keeps me accountable. I don't have the motivation to do it on my own."

Amaro hired Smith as her personal trainer and hit the weights early Tuesday morning. The times she came up short in the past continue pushing her forward, each a haunting reality of what could be if she fails to motivate herself this time around.

Unlike recent efforts, however, Amaro has more to lose than just weight. She now has a "biggest loser" competition to win, and she's taking it seriously.

Based on the reality TV show, the class challenges members to trim down and drop pounds. The effort began in January and, already, Amaro has lost eight pounds and shed nearly 10 inches from her body.

"I even took a half-inch off my calves," she said with a smile, beads of sweat still dotting her brow. "A trainer is really the only way to go."

Amaro has some tough competition in this year's biggest loser challenge.

Tamara Ashley, a stay-at-home mom, kicked her Mountain Dew habit (three bottles a day) and hit the gym on Jan. 10, vowing to accomplish what she tried and failed to do last year.

"Last year about the same time, I did the 'women on weights' and lost seven pounds," she said. "Then I put it all back on when summer came. We went on vacation and I never got back to it."



George Lane IR staff photographer - Donna Amaro gets a little help from her trainer, Anneliese Smith, as she starts one of her exercises. Amaro has been part of a weight-loss competition at the Broadwater Athletic Club.

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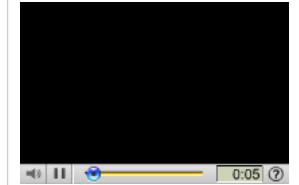
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Ashley takes the blame for failing in last year's fitness quest. With a laugh, she admits to getting lazy, calling it "totally my own fault."

Like so many others who began the year holding resolutions, Ashley quit working out. She stopped eating good food. But that was then, she said, and this is now.

"I've lost 11 pounds already and several inches in my hips, waist and arms," she said. "Once the competition comes to an end, I'm going to have to create a new goal for myself."

A similar weight-loss class at Crossroads Sports and Fitness has Reg Hageman on the path toward achieving his own resolutions.

Since January, the high school football coach and teacher has lost 37 pounds. It's a great start for man who entered the club after New Year's weighing 355 pounds.

"I made a commitment to myself after last football season that I would lose 50 pounds," said Hageman. "It's a pretty busy life being a teacher and a coach. I didn't have a lot of energy for my kids at the end of the day."

Hageman got serious about losing weight. He bought a gym membership and hired both a personal trainer and nutritionist. He likes to cook, so changing his eating habits was, he knew, fundamental to healthier living.

"It's taken some discipline with bagging stuff in smaller portions before you put it in the freezer," he said. "My trainer has helped with the intensity of my workouts. Since I've been working with her, I leave the club drenched."

Hageman's trainer, Stephanie Younkin, runs several programs at Crossroads, including the popular boot camp and the so-called butts and guts class. Like Smith at the Broadwater, she has noticed a steady stream of newcomers sticking with their goals.

The trick, Younkin said, is to keep them coming back. The challenge to return may get tougher as New Year's becomes a passing memory and those resolutions fade.

"We're still seeing new enrollments, though it's not as large as what we got around New Year's," Younkin said. "A lot of people come in wanting to lose certain pounds. We have a lot who are getting ready to run the races this spring. We have some going on vacations and want to look good."

Tom Bailly, who recently received his exercise science degree from Montana State University, believes lethargy and impatience may be the greatest obstacles newcomers face when chasing their fitness resolutions.

Bailly staffs the front desk at the Life Fitness Center on Helena's east side. As a rule of thumb, he said, it takes around 10 weeks for a person to notice the physical results of their efforts. The problem is, he adds, most newcomers don't last that long.

"They see a difference in performance, but nothing looks different in the mirror," he said. "They don't see anything for the first eight weeks. But if they could stick it out for one more month, they would."

Too many club-goers mistakenly believe that 30 minutes in the gym is all it takes to change their physical and mental well-being. The "jet-set, wanna-lose-their-tummy set," as Bailly calls them, aren't always willing to make the sacrifices involved in righting the ship of good physical health.

"It's not enough to come to the gym and stand on a treadmill for 30 minutes," he said. "There has to be other changes in their life."

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