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Complaining Worked - 24-Hour Fitness Acquiesces

By Cathy Tyson

Vindicated members celebrated power to the people upon hearing that the management of 24-Hour Fitness revisited their previous decision about increasing dues for most members and even got a little something extra for their trouble.

"It has become apparent to us that a number of our long-term and loyal members in Moraga did not have a positive experience with our organization during the opening of the new facility," said Divisional President Dan Benning in a letter sent to members. He goes on to say, "24-Hour apologizes for any confusion or inconvenience that may have occurred." Those that chose to "upgrade" will soon be refunded the \$9.95/month charge imposed to use the new club. They go the extra mile in allowing Moraga members access to Super Sport locations nationwide and are even throwing in a complimentary personal training session as a thank you for the hassle.

Prior to the grand opening of their new facility in Rheem this summer, many 24-Hour members were disgruntled at having to pay an additional fee and the rocky way the transition to the new club was handled. They were so angry that many complained to the Better Business Bureau, the District Attorney's office and to TV's "Seven on Your Side." It took a little while, but in this case the squeaky wheels got the grease.

Contra Costa Deputy District Attorney Steve Bolen confirmed he had been working on the issue, "Their transfer may not have exceeded, but certainly approached the unfair business practices threshold." The case in now closed.

The brouhaha started when long standing members of the older, original 24-Hour Fitness, formerly a Linda Evans facility, were abruptly told that they were welcome to use the Walnut Creek club, or pay the upgrade fee to what they defined as a new Super Sport level club just down the street. Only recent members, presumably paying higher dues, who joined in anticipation of the long-delayed club were excluded from the fee.

Many long term members were understandably upset, mostly because an additional charge was never mentioned or implied during the construction of the new gym.

"A lot of us complained to the company, to the District Attorney and to the club manager. I don't know which method had the greatest effect (perhaps all of them). I am really pleased by this result -- but they stopped short of admitting that this club is really not a Club Sport. Compared with many of the other Club Sports, it does not compare in size or amenities, said Annette Knox. "I think 24-Hour Fitness restored some good will by that move and I do appreciate their response."

Another member was pleased at the turn of events, while noting the unsavory process,

"While I still feel that the Super Sport designation for the club is inappropriate, I will give 24-Hour Fitness credit for taking care of its most loyal Moraga members by upgrading us for free. It is a shame though that we needed to complain so vehemently, even threatening lawsuits, before we were paid any attention," said Eric Yabu. "It left a bad taste in many members' mouths and was not a good introduction to our small community."

At 21,000 square feet, the new gym is large and upscale, but has less than half of the amenities of the normally 50,000 square feet Super Sport level clubs.

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