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Make a resolution to go to the gym? These folks have been going for years

By Sora O'Doherty



Personal trainer Stuart Moore works with client Chris McGuffin. Photos Sora O'Doherty

We all know the story: you make a New Year's resolution that this year will finally be the time you hit the gym - and keep it up! In January, the gyms are bursting at the seams, but by February, there seems to be a lot more space. Here are the stories of some people who go to the gym with amazing regularity, how they got started, and what keeps them motivated.

Carol Sueoka and Dolores Bjelland

For 11 years now, Orinda residents Carol Sueoka, 66, and her mother Dolores Bjelland, 88, have been hitting the gym 5 to 10 hours every week. Carol's reason for going? "I love my mother, and I want to keep her healthy." Carol has two grown children, who also exercise, but "Mom is my buddy," says Carol. The two buddies can be found at 24 Hour Fitness in Moraga taking classes in Zumba, Pilates, Yoga and Barre. Carol started back in 2008 when her daughter was getting married, and she wanted to look her best at the wedding.

The two women love the social aspect of the gym. They go early, and chat with their classmates. They love the teachers too, and find that the classes are fun, not work. Carol was touched when, a few years ago, she hurt her back and missed classes for two weeks. Her classmates phoned her husband to check and make sure that Carol was all right. Sometimes, she says, there are as many as 38 in a class, and she is glad that "we all help each other." Every class is different, she finds, and the variety keeps their minds engaged.

Twelve years ago, Carol had a benign tumor and after surgery, she started to exercise. She remembers that the instructor at her first class started laughing. The classes bring her a lot of joy, and she says the music makes you want to dance. "Mom has always exercised," Carol recalls, saying how she used to exercise in a closet with Richard Simmons on the television. Dolores now lives with Carol and her husband. When they aren't exercising, the family loves to cook, and were once featured in the Lamorinda Weekly in 2009 when they were found cooking paella in the park.

Stuart Moore

Marine Corps veteran Stuart Moore, 72, had a varied career before landing at 24 Hour Fitness, where he works as a personal trainer and teaches classes. Starting in college at the University of Arizona he joined the Marine Corps Office Candidate School and spent summers training at Quantico, Virginia. The day he graduated he was commissioned as a second lieutenant and was stationed in Okinawa. He spent his career in the Marines doing long-range training, finishing at Camp Pendleton where he trained hundreds of marines. The day after he left the Marines he began work as a trainee stockbroker, then changed careers and landed in real estate.

In 2007 his wife was tragically killed in a fall from a stallion and then the real estate crisis in 2008 added to his troubles. "It was a dark time for me," he says. The prospect of selling foreclosed properties didn't appeal to him, so instead he enrolled at the National Academy of Sports Medicine, where he earned five certifications. Some gyms weren't interested in the idea of an older trainer, but a 30-year-old manager at 24 Hour Fitness took him on in Pleasanton. Then he heard that the senior fitness job was opening in Moraga. He started with eight classes a month and now teaches 32. "We are the only club out of 465 that has the senior program," he says. Among the classes that he offers are Senior Fitness and Senior Yoga. "I don't agree with the theory of physical training, I want it to be fun," he says. "I've love this stuff since I was 12. "I don't like to call it exercise." Stuart talks to a lot of groups. "Children play. They don't say, 'let's exercise,'" he says. They say, "let's ride bikes!" According to Stuart, we've lost our sense of play.

Deborah Scott

When her mother died in 2011, a friend said to Deborah, "let's go work out." She started out walking on the treadmill three times a week. She had tried losing weight with a diet plan, and did go down from 240 pounds to 170, but then bounced back to 210. But now Deborah has managed to lose her extra weight and keep it off with her workouts. Deborah had her son later in life, at age 44, and retired early from her job as an assistant research professor in rubber bio-chemistry to raise him. Now 63, Deborah is at the gym almost every day, working with two different personal trainers, Enrique and Brian, and taking classes. On Fridays, she goes bowling.

Her husband, a former Miramonte wrestler and football player, goes to a gym in Orinda, but Deborah prefers the programs at 24 Hour Fitness. "It's a lifestyle," she believes. Before she started, she was having trouble with her shoulders. When she started working with a trainer, she discovered that she had "no core." She says that she spent four to five years working on her shoulders. She views her investment in the gym as a lovely gift to herself. In addition to finding out how to exercise without hurting herself, she says that she has gained so much confidence. Plus, she says, when she does Zumba Gold for seniors it is "the only time my mind actually shuts down."

"I do this for myself," she says. "My goal is to stay fit so that I can enjoy my life!"

Whitney Jaeger

Whitney met her husband at age 16 when she was in high school in Petaluma. When she was 19 they married with about four days notice when her husband was home on leave between basic training and advanced individual training. They were stationed in Ansbach Germany in 2006 and her husband served tours of duty in Afghanistan and Iraq. Since leaving the military, he got a job with PricewaterhouseCoopers where he works in asset and wealth management assurance and they moved to the Bay Area.

After having her two children within 18 months of each other, Whitney found herself weighing about 240 pounds. She joined a gym in Tennessee, where her husband was then stationed, "but I had no idea what to do," she says. While walking on an elliptical machine, she says, she was approached by a trainer in her small club, who encouraged her to come to a Bodypump class. She did and found she loved the challenge. She moved up to Body Combat, another Les Mills program, and lost nearly 60 pounds. When she arrived in Lamorinda in 2015, she joined 24 Hour Fitness because they offer the Les Mills classes. After a while, she felt so confident that she became certified, and now teaches Bodypump, Body Combat, Body Attack and Grit, which is a high intensity 30-minute class. Most of her classes are 55 minutes long, and are usually attended by up to 38 students.

Whitney has an associate's degree and a Certified Nursing Assistant certification. She is now certified as a personal trainer, and works at the 24 Hour Fitness clubs in Moraga and Concord. She fits her classes around the schedules of her two children, but when she teaches at night, they go to the club's Kid's Club.

What's your story?



Carol Sueoka dances at Zumba class.



Deborah Scott works out with personal trainer Enrique Jauregui.



Instructor Whitney Jaeger



Whitney Jaeger teaches Body Pump class at 24 Hour Fitness in Moraga on Rheem Boulevard.

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