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Southwest

Fitness Buddies Stay on Track Together

Members of the Orlando Women Runners hold each other accountable for getting out of bed on Saturday mornings and committing themselves to getting fit together.

By Lyndsay Fogarty
 Photos by Brian Adams PhotoGraphics, www.bapg.net

For many, juggling the tasks of being a parent and working to support the family allows little time to exercise. But the women of the Orlando Women Runners group use the buddy system to keep each other from dropping their exercise routines.

Wendy Trinh, a working mother with two young daughters, started the group in September. Seven people showed up to the first run at RD Keene's Pointe Park in Windermere. Nearly three months later, the group has steadily grown to more than 240 members.

"My intent was just to have a few people to run with," says Trinh. "The challenge of being fit is being consistent and staying motivated."

For many of the members, the accountability factor is what keeps them on the roads every Saturday morning instead of in their beds. The weekly e-mails from Trinh that ask if they are coming help get them to the park, too. If it wasn't for this encouragement, they might find a reason not to come.

Keeping the Pace

Anywhere between 15 and 20 members run at the park every Saturday morning, and every three to four weeks, they change their location to Cady Way Trail in Winter Park for a change of scenery. Trinh has marked out a four and six mile course and keeps the times for all of the members who choose to participate.

The runners' times have shown a vast improvement since the group began running together. As a team, they have improved by a minute and 30 seconds, with some members shaving three to five minutes off of their times from one week to the next.

"It would be on my to-do list. I wouldn't do it, and I would put it on my to-do list for the next day," says Amanda Bush, who has been a member for approximately a month and holds one of the fastest paces for the six-mile course.

"Just coming back the next week is an improvement," adds Doreen Torres-Gray.

Everyone has the opportunity to run at their own pace because there is no pressure within the group to keep up. It is a motivation, though. "I typically finish strong," says Hallie Brown, the other contender for fastest pace on the six-mile course who has been a member from the beginning. "There is always someone ahead of me that pushes me to keep up with them."

Motivation Leads to Participation

Through the Orlando Women Runners group, Trinh has found a small group of women who live near her and will participate in mid-week runs in their neighborhood. They run a three-mile loop around their neighborhood and will sometimes bring their kids or dogs if they feel like breaking a sweat with mom.

These runs, which last about an hour, prepare them for the weekend runs with members from all areas of town and provide an opportunity to get to know each other better. Trinh has even found out that one of the members of the group she formed could be related to a friend in the Midwest.

For Trinh, running the Orlando Women Runners group has become another job. She organizes each run by sending e-mails to members reminding them of the event, keeping an RSVP list and keeping track of the runner's times. She always has a snack bag prepared with a water bottle, banana and granola bar and awards for members after everyone, including herself, has crossed the finish line. The awards are ribbons inscribed with the motivational phrase, "every step is a victory." Trinh describes the ribbons as "high fives" that everyone can hold

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Women of all ages and professions participate in the group runs, with professors and college students coming together with first time moms and grandmothers. Even though there are a wide variety of participants, the main goal of this group is to be fit. Since the beginning, they have been a support system to each other, offering encouragement to reach their running goals. "Some people are born runners," says Trinh. "I'm not a born runner. It's a constant challenge."

As the founder of the group, she feels accountable because she knows the other members are expecting her to be there. Since she finds it so easy to find an excuse not to run, having her friends there to run with her provides her with an excuse to get out of bed, get to the park and work on staying healthy.

While the common goal among the women in the group is being fit, a larger goal is on the horizon. Trinh is currently working with other Orlando Women Runners members to map out a course and make her idea of a women's marathon a reality. "I want it exclusive to women to encourage more women to get into sports, not just exercising," she says. "It would advocate community involvement and environmental impact."

If you're interested in joining the Orlando Women Runners, contact Wendy Trinh at wendy@orlandowomenrunners.com, or visit their Web site at <http://www.orlandowomenrunners.com/>.

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Tips on Keeping Fit
By Dr. Jeffrey N. Shebovsky
West Orange Wellness & Injury Center and SuperSlow Zone

Now that you've found a friend to help keep you motivated, don't overlook these key points when working out and keeping fit.







1. Always include strength training.
 Starting in our 30s, we lose muscle mass every year. By age 45, muscle mass begins to decline at a rate of approximately 1 percent per year. Strength training can help reduce your muscle mass losses.
2. Low impact aerobics are best.
 Current research is showing that aerobics is falling out of favor. This is mostly due to the lack of any strength building in the muscles and injuries to the joints. Engage in low impact activities such as walking and swimming.
3. Eat enough protein.
 Muscles need protein to be healthy and strong and to rebuild and repair. Not having enough protein will cause the body to take that protein from the muscles when it is needed.
4. Never work out without proper fuel.
 The worst thing you can try to do is have an intense workout without having eaten anything. There are many good things to eat before a workout. Always make sure they include some complex carbs for energy.
5. Rest and repair.
 Your workout, especially strength training, should serve as a stimulus for growth. After taxing your muscles, the following 48 to 72 hours should be used to let the body rebuild and repair the muscles you have challenged.

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