

Boomers Redefine the Idea of Exercise

By Cecily O'Connor
RedwoodAge.com

Keeping the fitness industry in shape will take a commitment to better understanding baby boomers, who are redefining such basic notions as "gyms" and "workouts."



Larry Feinman of Fitness Together.

At least one facility in Northern California has established itself as a baby boomer health club, while some other gyms and personal trainers are offering a wide array of classes and services to meet the needs of health-conscious adults between the ages of 61 and 43.

Clubs targeting baby boomers are putting more emphasis on spa services, personal training and low-impact exercise routines, said Dave Remick, director at **Mercanti Group**, an investment bank in Minneapolis that recently issued a report on merger and acquisition activity in the health club industry. Clubs are finding success because "they have identified a niche and gone after it," Mr. Remick said. It's that kind of approach that has made clubs like Curves, which caters to women, successful, Mr. Remick added.

Arleen Cauchi was inspired to create a fitness club for baby boomers because the 44-year-old former high-tech marketing executive said she felt there was something lacking.

"I started looking at how a lot of my friends exercise, and how my parents exercise, and I thought, 'There's got to be a better way,'" Ms. Cauchi said. "What's unique about baby boomers and what's missing?"

Ms. Cauchi filled the void with Boomer Fitness in San Carlos, Calif., which opened its doors three months ago. The club creates customized workouts for adults 35 and older, and serves a wide range of clients. There are some who participate in the club's golf and tennis conditioning programs, others who are training at the facility to hike on Mount Kilimanjaro, or those who are simply looking to stay better shape to keep up with grandkids on the weekends, Ms. Cauchi said.

"Baby boomers are part of the generation that first embraced fitness," Ms. Cauchi said. "But as we age, our fitness needs to change to address our (physical) needs."

No Big Box

Baby boomers' awareness of healthy living is a key factor driving growth of the U.S. health club industry overall during the past 10-plus years, according to The Mercanti Group report. Adults aged 35 to 54 represented 32.7 percent of the U.S. health club population overall in 2005, according to the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association. This segment has increased by 113 percent since 1990.

Fitness Together, a personal training organization with over 500 franchises in five countries, is among those facilities benefiting from boomers' fitness fancy. As opposed to a "big, box gym," **Fitness Together** provides customized, 45-minute training sessions to a growing number of baby boomers, said Larry Feinman, owner of a five-month-old franchise in Mill Valley, Calif.

"We do a lot of what's called functional training," he said. "We do training that mimics motions and movement patterns, and lifting patterns that people would do in everyday life."

Mr. Feinman, a chiropractor by trade, said many of his clients place emphasis on working with a trainer who's knowledgeable about nutrition, injury prevention, rehabilitation, and other areas.

"I keep my chiropractor's license active, and look at different seminars to keep aware of cutting-edge stuff in the fitness industry," Mr. Feinman said. "So we do change things around."

Hybrids

One characteristic that sets facilities like Fitness Together and Boomer Fitness apart from gyms is the way they feel. The 1,600-square foot Boomer Fitness location is a hybrid between a gym and a physical therapy office, mimicking "the décor of a country club," said Ms. Cauchi, noting that clients train on carpet, rather than a rubber floor.

Boomer Fitness also provides similar equipment found in a physical therapy office, including exercise balls, resistance bands, free weights and mats. That's attractive to clients who have recently completed physical therapy, and need a facility in which they can continue their regiment, Ms. Cauchi said.

Similarly, Fitness Together in Mill Valley plans to provide heart rate monitors that will connect to the cardio equipment. And as far as aesthetics go, the training site comes equipped with private bathrooms, water and towels, and music that can be piped into the training rooms based on the client's preference.

"It's almost like having your own private gym or facility in your house," Mr. Feinman said.

Prices at each club vary wildly, depending on what you want. Each training session at Fitness Together can run between \$55 and \$75, depending on the client's needs. Boomer Fitness rates can fluctuate based on discounts and specials. But currently, a boomer might pay \$150 to join, and then \$59 a month for 12 months.

The Great Outdoors



Constantine Darling on retreat
(www.JackPhoto.com)

Not all customized training is occurring indoors, however. Some boomers are opting for body and mind experiences, said Constantine Darling, who leads trips to Australia, Thailand, and other areas.

The journeys are designed to provide boomers and others the ability to practice Chien Lung, yoga, breathing and meditation, while also taking time to appreciate the calm of nature by breathing clean air and getting energy from rivers, oceans and surrounding greenery.

Live drummers have even been part of the excursions in the past to teach participants chants and rhythms, Mr. Darling said.

The trips enable boomers to become "reacquainted with their tribal" selves, said Mr. Darling, a martial artist and former Alvin Ailey dance instructor.

"People become isolated in a civilized society... with work and kids."

In July, Mr. Darling plans to lead a group of 35 adults and kids to the Grand Canyon. The trip costs \$1,250, and includes camping and food.

Mr. Darling also teaches jazz dance classes at Meridian sports in San Rafael, Calif., said the majority of his students are aged 40 and up. Jazz dance is "wonderful" exercise because it helps people develop core strength focus on ease of motion through graceful movements, Mr. Darling said.