

Teachers Train to Stay Fit

Twelve teachers.

Ten weeks.

One challenge.

A long-time personal trainer in town, Phil Morris, owner of The Fitness Group, is always trying to identify a way to use his skills to help the community. This time, he found what he was looking for at home.

“I’m always looking to see where there’s a need and, as the husband of a teacher, I see what kind of stress they’re under and what kind of days they have,” Morris said. “Having run group fitness classes in the past, I thought this would be a perfect fit.”

And thus began the inaugural Most to Gain, Most to Lose Challenge, which has enrolled 12 teachers in a 10-week course designed to help them shed some pounds and tone up through a program of exercises individualized to each person’s abilities and limitations.

“It’s a challenge, but it’s as much of a personal challenge as it is anything else,” Morris said, adding that he will return the user fee to the teacher who loses the most weight. “It’s a diverse group, and we’ve had a lot of fun so far.”

The goal, said Charlyn Bethell, a music teacher at the Willard School, is to get in shape, stay in shape and feel good all the time.

“I’m really happy to be involved,” she said. “I think what I’m learning here is how to be independent and do these exercises at home. I would like to lose five pounds, but if I didn’t lose five pounds and still felt better and was in good shape, that would be OK.”

From Morris’s perspective, the goal is to expose the teachers to everything the fitness center has to offer — bikes, elliptical machines and strength and resistance training. Some of the teachers work out at gyms or in clubs, while others do their exercises at their homes, so Morris and his staff focused their routines on Pilates balls and resistance tubes.

The teachers come in to The Fitness Group studio for weekly weigh-ins and return every few weeks for measurements of body fat percentage, Body Mass Index, girth, heart rate and blood pressure. Morris and his staff strongly recommend the teachers come into the studio for two of three workouts offered weekly, and give them homework — a binder filled with weekly dietary, strength and cardio goals.

The course began a few weeks ago and runs through the holidays, with another program slated to start in January. Typically, seven or eight of the teachers attend each workout, Morris said. And last Friday was no different.

“I love it,” said Pat Brewer, a special education tutor at Thoreau School, who joined the program to inject a change into a solo routine she had seen plateau. “I like the group experience. I work out at another gym, but that’s all alone stuff. I like this better.”

Karen Hoyt, who teaches fifth grade at Thoreau School, said she joined to get in shape, but not necessarily to lose weight. Improving her aerobics was a goal, because she’s “not fit inside,” she said.

“I like to see my friends when I come in the door,” Hoyt said. “That feels comfortable because I didn’t really like to go out and exercise.”

“And Phil’s great. He’s nice, understanding and he pushes you,” Hoyt said. Bethell agreed.

“We’re teachers,” she said. “We recognize a good teachers.”

Said Sandra Arena, an assistant kindergarten teacher at Thoreau School, “I hadn’t worked out in five or six years. I was apprehensive, skeptical, because of my lack of motivation, but Phil has been so encouraging, and we come right after school with friends, so we’re talking in between.” Arena said the balance of motivation and support is just what she needs to reach her main goal of toning up and getting back into shape.

“If you feel good about yourself, that’s going to carry over to the rest of your day,” she said.