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Ab Crunch event held at Ladies Workout Express

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Ladies Workout Express owner Kathy Powell, bottom, tries to help make a workout fun for participants preparing for the Ab Crunch Challenge on Saturday.

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Two thousand, nine-hundred ninety eight. Two thousand, nine hundred ninety nine. Three thousand.

Three thousand sit-ups, that is. That's the number of sit-ups that Kathy Powell, local franchise owner of Ladies Workout Express, will try to do this Saturday as she raises money for the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. In conjunction with the national corporation, thousands of women across the country will "feel the bum" as they crunch their abs for one hour straight during their first national "Ab Crunch Challenge." The participants hope to set a Guinness World Record for the most abdominal crunches done in one hour by a group.

Powell said it was worth doing 3,000

sit-ups for such a good cause.

"St. Jude is an excellent organization," said Powell. "We were thrilled to help such a worthy cause."

For seven weeks, about 15 local women have trained to build up their strength and endurance to perform hundreds of stomach crunches, while improving their core fitness. Starting with 20 minutes worth of practice and training exercises at the beginning of February, the women have added five to ten minutes of exercises each week to improve their stamina.

Kristy Lane, manager of the local franchise and Powell's daughter, said the entire franchise is participating in the fundraiser.

"St. Jude is such a wonderful hospital, we wanted to be involved and we wanted to get as many people involved as we could," said Lane. "We're still signing people up to do sit-ups."

"Crunch for yourself. Crunch for the kids" is the motto of the campaign as they try to raise money for the St. Jude. Not only does the hospital treat hundreds of seriously sick children, it is an internationally recognized research facility which is trying to find cures for cancer, sickle-cell anemia and other diseases that afflict children. The national corporation for Ladies Workout Express is hoping to raise \$1,000,000 for the hospital.

St. Jude takes patients regardless of their family's ability to pay. It covers the costs of treatment beyond those covered by third-party insurers and covers the total cost of treatment when no insurance is available. In addition, it helps families with transportation costs and living expenses while children are undergoing treatment.

The local women participating in the challenge are singularly committed to helping the charity.

Sharon Harris is a full-time culinary arts student at OTC and a broil cook at 119 Chops. She said there's two good reasons to participate in the challenge, besides being recruited by Powell.

"Two reasons: It's for a good cause and summer is coming up," said Harris.

Amanda Lewis works in the Head Start program at the William James Educational Complex. She's a member of the gym, saw the advertisement and "volunteered for the torture."

"It sounded like a great cause and a good reason to get in shape," said Lewis.

Harris said she going to shoot for 1,500 to 2,000 sit-ups on Saturday, but she's going to wait until her final practice on Tuesday to set a final goal.

Rose Butterbaugh, also a member of Workout Express, said she has a real soft spot for sick kids. She's twice grown her hair out and donated it to kids surviving chemotherapy through the Lock of Love program.

"I try to do what I can for sick kids — it's that simple," said Butterbaugh. "I'm constantly asking for sponsors and am looking to raise \$750 for the hospital."

Anyone who would like to donate to support the local sit-uppers can go to www.abcrunchchallenge.org and click the "Donate Now" link at the top of the page. When the United States map comes up, click on Georgia and look for the link to the Statesboro franchise. Donations can be given to the entire group, or an individual cruncher can be sponsored.



Stanetta Fields toughs out a workout in preparation with other participants in Saturday's Ab Crunch Challenge.



Ladies Workout Express manager Christy Lane, bottom center, leads a workout for participants in Saturday's Ab Crunch Challenge.