

Fundraising is the crunch of the matter

BY MARY ANN TARR
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

HAMILTON — Here's a sentence I never thought I would say: "Crunchette-in-training reporting for duty."

Yet, for part of the last month, that has been exactly what has been going on as I prepare to join Tony "Captain Crunch" Parziale and the Crunchettes in an endeavor that combines elements of fitness — the physical kind as well as the spiritual kind.

Parziale, who started an event here that has blossomed to become a national fundraiser, is a key figure in the history of the Ab Crunch Challenge, which is scheduled to take place Saturday in more than 200 locations nation-

wide, including the Ladies Workout Express on Kuser Road and Lady of America and Workout Express fitness centers elsewhere.

More than \$1 million is expected to be raised for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital as participants seek sponsorship for the event, which requires them to do as many abdominal crunches as possible in an hour.

In 2006, Parziale began the Ab Crunch Challenge as a fun fundraiser at his Hamilton and Lawrenceville Ladies Workout Express centers, and he was delighted when the event went national last year. The Hamilton Ladies Workout Express has about 20 women for this year's event, including a late-arriving cruncher (me).

The Ab Crunch Challenge came along at a good time for me mentally, but I wish I had more time to prepare to turn my flab crunches

into ab crunches. I have hovered around being physically fit my whole life, although at times perhaps a couple of pounds overweight and, on a few occasions, a few pounds underweight. I like to think that, for much of the time, as in the tale of Goldilocks, I have been "just right."

I walk — or should I say I am walked — a couple of miles daily with an exuberant black Labrador retriever (is there any other kind?) but the march of time has played a role in shifting around the sand in my previously hourglass figure.

A former aerobic instructor, I know the value of being strong and fit. My work as a sports writer has forever kept me around athletes, but I have learned that typing just isn't going to get the job done physically.

Opportunities such as the Ab Crunch Challenge have helped in-

spire me to do just the right thing, combining the quest for vim and vigor and the return to a better figure while helping a bigger cause. A nasty bout with the flu and a subsequent relapse have forced me to miss valuable training time, but like athletes everywhere say, "I'll do my best this year, but there's always next year!"

I've had two major jobs in my life, one lasted for 20 years and the other for 30, and I've never considered myself a clock-watcher. But I caught myself on many occasions searching for a timepiece at the hour-long training sessions conducted during the last month at the Ladies Workout Express.

Parziale keeps the workouts fun as he poses Trivial Pursuit or Are You Smarter Than a Fifth-Grader questions to the huddled and befuddled masses on the mats on the floor.



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I held my own with the trivia but ended up holding my stomach, aching from laughter as well as the workout. The other source of pain (other than my pride), came from

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my arms, which seemed to hurt just from being held behind my head.

Many of the women, including Barbara Bestwick, Maria Bunda, Jamie Burd, Kathy Clemency, Christine Ford, Tiffany Harkleroad, Debbie Hess, Denise Miller, Karen Nardelli, Kara Nitti, Donna Parziale, Amanda Pfeiffer, Megan Price, Jill Reitschmid, Sarah Rock, Gina

Verhalen, Heather Walker, Lisa Wilding and Amanda Wyszynski, are the real Crunchettes, toiling under the tutelage of Parziale, who is listed in the Guinness world records book for his prowess in performing sit-ups.

Parziale — who gained Guinness recognition for completing more than 4,000 sit-ups within a one-hour time limit — plans to submit the national information from Saturday's event for consideration as a Guinness world record for most ab crunches done as a group

within a one-hour period. They didn't acknowledge last year's Ab Crunch Challenge.

But, whatever the number is, and whether or not it is recognized by the Guinness people, another amount will be the real cause for people to sit up and take notice. That is the dollar amount raised to help fund the research and treatment of pediatric cancer and other catastrophic childhood diseases.

Information is available and donations are accepted online at www.abcrunchchallenge.org.