

Fitness buffs to crunch for charity

West Hempstead gym hosting sit-up marathon

By MATT HAMPTON

Sit-ups are about to get even healthier, as a local women's gym is hosting its fourth annual Ab Crunch Challenge for charity. Lady of America Fitness in West Hempstead will be hopping on Saturday, March 28 at 11 a.m. Owner Vita Zorbo encouraged residents to come out and bring a partner to help them count their crunches, and bring in donations for the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. The hospital is a treatment and research center for patients with pediatric cancer and other life-threatening or catastrophic diseases.

Ab Crunch Challenge is the brainchild of Tony Parziale, who runs a Lady of America Fitness in New Jersey. He brought the idea to Zorbo, owner of the local West Hempstead branch, back in 2006.

"I was one of four clubs that originally started the Ab Crunch Challenge," Zorbo said. "Members were so interested in it, and it built a lot of excitement and momentum, and we thought, 'why not roll it out to the entire franchise system?'"

In only three years, the challenge has brought in more than \$250,000, and continues to grow. Zorbo thinks that as the message gets out to the community at large, it will be even easier for the donations — and the crunchers — to add up.

"If we can help make a difference in something so great, why not?" she said. "The top fundraisers get to go visit the hospital. I was able to do that last year and it forever changed my life."

Zorbo said that the money raised sponsors four individual children for treatment and hospital stays.

In 2006, the first year of the challenge, the four participating gyms brought in just over \$20,000. After the idea was presented to the national chain, more than 150 fitness clubs nationwide joined in, and raised over \$200,000 in 2008.

Last year, 30 crunchers compiled an impressive 88,000 sit-ups, and raised more than \$10,000 at Zorbo's West Hempstead location. This year, she's hoping to double that dollar amount, regardless of the number of crunchers. She said 40 gym members have already signed up, and she is hoping for more before the weekend. Participants only have to bring a good attitude and a partner to help them keep track of their crunches.

Ida Golden, 42, a Franklin Square resident and new gym member, is excited to hit the mat for this year's challenge. She joined the gym last September, and while she hasn't participated before, she hopes to last the entire crunching hour.

She'll be bringing her 11-year-old son, Martin, along to crunch as well.

"Anything that has to do with children — that makes that their lives healthier and better — we try to do that," Golden said. "I'm just hoping to hold out for the whole hour, if possible."

Any area residents wanting to join in the Ab Crunch Challenge, or to help out by providing food and water or other services to the participants, are invited to call Zorbo at (516) 565-5239. Registration will remain open until the event itself on Saturday morning, held at Lady Of America Fitness at 400 Hempstead Turnpike in West Hempstead.



Andrew Vardakis/Herald

VITA ZORBO, of Lady of America Fitness in West Hempstead, is hoping to encourage residents to crunch for St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital this Saturday.