

## **How “FREAKS” were born...**

**Monday April 27,2009**

West Forsyth Family YMCA launched it's first Les Mills program in January 2007 ... little did we know... fitness freaks were born. The members were convinced the facility didn't need any new programs- they were already “IN” shape and doing so with good programs. The leadership only allowed for forty pieces of equipment as a “trial run” when we bought into the Les Mills system. Because of the shortfall of equipment, we decided to have four classes on launch day. One week prior to launch date we set up 4 ticket areas in which members could drop their name and phone numbers in for a drawing to choose who got into class. We hung launch posters, played a DVD of Les Mills in the lobby, and made announcements prior to each group fitness class to continue the hype. What we did not anticipate was that over 2400 ticket requests were placed in bowls with hope to have their name drawn for the drawing. We continued to collect tickets for 2 more days but stopped counting.

For the first time in the 5 years I had worked at our facility... members were talking to one another unlike ever before- people from varied socio-economic backgrounds... worlds as they knew it... colliding due to Les Mills BODYPUMP. It was GREAT!!!!

The launch was a success and the “FITNESS FREAKS” were in motion. We had to provide a call in sign up 24 hours prior to class in order to ensure a bar- although unfortunate in some ways, it was once again- a common bond members shared. Due to high member response to class, we ordered 20 additional bars. For the next 18 months members called in for 60 bars for 11 classes per week... Each one with max capacity and waiting lists. Before the year was up in 2008, we purchased another 20 bars for a total of 80, and still max out the equipment on launch days!

So you ask- how could this be a way to create FREAKS????... They were driven to call in for class, (as early as 5am- 24 hours prior to taking class) driven to participate at all different class times any day of the week. Member relationships were developing unlike ever before due to lining up in the hallway prior to class- talking with one another- discussing workouts, other classes, you name it. For those members who were alternates “hoping” to get in if others didn't show- the members created the “wall of shame”- the members would tease one another from across the hall about not calling in on time- saying they were now going to be stronger than the other... in a “twisted way” the humor and razzing one another was yet another GREAT connection!!!

After 4 months into the program, members were beginning to come forth and share “their stories of success”. So we then encouraged members to write their story of what Group Fitness had done for them. We asked if they would write their story & provide the time of class they attended most. As a Group Fitness team, we would select a story for 4 specific time frames of the day- vote on a story- the individual that won would receive 3 additional months free to their membership. Four members received this- had their stories posted with pictures hung. Members now began to share ‘their stories” even MORE with one another, connecting and conversing, finding commonalities which they never knew before.

We are a non-profit facility- money is tight... so creativity is a MUST. We began asking companies to sponsor the launches, and in turn we advertised for them and got great prizes. Now sponsors are asking us when the next quarterly's are! We have now been giving prizes such as Bruce Springsteen; Earth, Wind, and Fire tickets, Chicago tickets, Davis Cup Tennis match tickets, autographed basketballs and photos from championship teams, etc... We rode the wave of our program launch and decided to try and make each launch something special. We created themes- made shirts, hats, etc for the launch teams to wear during launches. After the launch- we would collect orders for the next 10 days and then purchase the same shirts, hats, etc for members. Not only were members signing up to attend the new release launches- excited about the "unknown theme", anticipating some great gift giveaways we provide, wanting to hear the new music, but now they were equally excited about what we would be wearing and would they want to order it. They were "totally hooked" on connecting to class, the program and one another. People would buy items to give away as gifts!!! Crazy!

The facility became so connected to Les Mill's programs, we have now added Flow, Vive, and RPM, all having great success.

Prior to our first year anniversary- To my surprise, the team decided they would throw a "thank you" surprise in celebration for bringing the program one year prior. Members hand wrote thank you notes stating how much they loved the program, how it has changed their lives, thanking the BODYPUMP TEAM of instructors for all being so good and caring... again- now they are SUCH FREAKS... they want to thank staff for having the program. (Let me make something clear... in all the years I have spent working here... it was a rare occasion that acknowledgement was given to Group Fitness staff.)

After teaching to a packed class of 60 folks- to my surprise during the cool down an additional group of members & staff walked in the studio with a large cake, balloons and banner all singing Happy birthday to "BODYPUMP"!!! My husband had put together a slide show of all launches up to that point- wonderful shots of our members. We all gathered around, "high fived" and reflected on the year w/ stories as we watched the pictures flash by noting obvious body changes from the year.

Yet another surprise in October 2008 my husband and another BodyPump instructor surprised us with a trip to the Les Mills filmings in October. The four instructors had the trip of a lifetime! The great thing was that we threw two parties over the course of the next two weeks. First with all of the Les Mills instructors to showcase the photos and tell the stories, then with a mere 2 days notification we invited members, and had well over 60 members come to learn about the "big picture" of Les Mills, and they spread the story of Les mills to others.

**"YES- a FAMILY of FREAKS is growing!!!"**

In January 2008 we decided to collect emails as a Group Fitness department. It began as a test- only to find it is grew beyond our wildest dreams. We now have over 300 names for

BODYPUMP alone. As we continued to grow additional Les Mills programs, we have created lists for them also. Our Les Mills email group utilizes the web to inform members on what to look forward to- events, new release launches, schedule additions, you name it. They love to write back and provide input as well.

The YMCA has a unique fund raiser each year- one which is done for the sole purpose to provide financial assistance to anyone who could otherwise not afford to pay for a membership, provide safe after school shelter until parents can pick up their child from work, etc. Due to the strong bonds made specifically with class connections, I was asked to create a “member team” to help with fund raising this year. Our Group Fitness team raised over \$7,000.00 (with one donor- still in the works- possibly giving \$10,000.00) all going toward the building goal of \$180,000.00 this year.

Last but not least, Saturday April 18 we hosted a Huge event- “Healthy Kids Day Fitness Frenzie”. Healthy Kids Day is nationally recognized by the YMCA for families to become active, specifically- children! We decided to plan an event that the entire family could enjoy. By uniting the entire facility, we had a Les Mills mini quarterly with our 4 programs (4 Pump classes, 3 Flow classes, 2 Vibe classes, and 5 RPM classes)- launching all new releases that day, along w/ 2 Zumba classes, Family Sports Fitness, Aquatics, Tumbling Tots, Angel Bear Yoga, Sports Obstacle, Teen Games, and more. We ran classes from 7:30am until 1:00. Beginning at 2:00pm we had live music, food & drinks at a nearby Country Club. We marketed the social as “commit to connect”. Encouraging families to come and enjoy with the opportunity to win a prize from our numerous drawings. We had over 700 attendees for the fitness morning and 200+ for the social event in the afternoon. Not bad considering the number of community events that were also taking place that day. Members & Guests thoroughly enjoyed the day. We have even grown freaks who want to be a part of the event if we elect to do it again next year!

So what kind of FREAKS do we have in our community?

- **Fitness FREAKS**
- **Family FREAKS** (we encourage 10+ to attend VIVE & FLOW w/ family)
- **Fundraising FREAKS**
- **Social FREAKS**
- **Instructor Seeking FREAKS**- adults wanting to know more on the “how to become an instructor”
- **Mini-Les Mills FREAKS**- children saying they want to be a Les Mills instructor when they grow up!
- **Committed FREAKS**- who during a time of hard choices with money and employment would not consider letting go of their membership in order to do their body good through mind, body and spirit! And growing... !

**Link to article**

**‘Member satisfaction and GF attendance growth soar’**

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Sincerely,

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