

Women Find FITNESS, FLEXIBILITY & FUN at County RECenters

BY MATTHEW KAISER
PHOTOS BY DON SWEENEY, FAIRFAX COUNTY
PARK AUTHORITY PHOTOGRAPHER

After giving birth to her first child by emergency Cesarean section, yoga enthusiast Melissa Baker felt regaining her pre-baby body was unattainable. Doctors said her abdominal muscles would never regain their former strength. Baker resigned herself to the reality that she would never be able to practice yoga like she had in her early twenties. However, things changed for her a year later when she and her mother decided to take a Pilates class together at Cub Run RECenter, one of the Fairfax County Park Authority's nine recreation centers.

"We instantly fell in love. There was a wide variety of ages in the class and the teacher accommodated all of us. The environment was friendly and not overly crowded," Baker said. Soon she was taking classes two days a week, which led to what she describes as an amazing transformation. "I felt not only had I repaired my body from the C-section, but I was actually stronger than I had ever been," Baker recalled. Her newfound fitness had a positive effect on other aspects of her life, too. She began mountain biking with her husband and eating healthier, and now teaches Pilates, spin, and yoga classes.

Fairfax County Park Authority Fitness and Wellness section manager Monica Phillips loves hearing stories like Baker's. She says RECenters are expanding services to meet the demands of busy women who are embracing active lifestyles and described RECenters as a "one-stop-shop" for family fitness. "As women make decisions on where to work out, we want them to feel like they belong here," Phillips

said. "We offer popular, cutting-edge classes such as Barre, BodyPump, and TRX. Our class schedules are flexible and we even offer drop-in childcare services at Oak Marr," she added.

South Run RECenter member Kara King has been taking classes ranging from Total Toning to Cardio Sculpt and Cycle Spin for nearly five years. King likes the convenient location and the variety of equipment and classes offered, but she said the best thing about being a member is the people. "The gym is a very social atmosphere for me. We all know each other and are friends. The people that work at South Run are also great. The instructors recognize that not everyone can do everything and offer modifications that allow you to still get a good workout. I have a lot of fun at South Run," King said.

Baker says her classes are filled with people of all ages and fitness levels and that she feels connected to a community. "I've never felt a sense of competition or that I needed to fit into any kind of stereotype. That's not to say anything bad about other gyms but there is just a different feel to the RECenter that I better connect with."

Julie Beck, fitness director at Cub Run RECenter, agrees that the best thing about Park Authority RECenters is the atmosphere. "We have all the high-energy fitness instructors, without any of the high-pressure salespeople. Women will get a great workout in a facility that is inviting and where everyone is welcome," she explains.

When it comes to setting fitness goals, Baker

tells her students to make exercise fun before they make it challenging. "Why come to the gym and run on the treadmill if you hate it? If you like to dance, dance, whether it's in a Zumba class or at home like nobody's watching. Just get moving," she says.



Get started today!

Sign up for Take 12! at: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/rec/take12. Purchase a Park Authority RECenter membership at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/passes. Four and 12-month passes are on sale from Jan. 1-Feb. 14.



Liz Ittner coordinates Take 12! Steps for Health, a free program that helps participants accomplish healthy goals throughout the year. She says the New Year is the perfect time to sign up to receive her monthly e-newsletter, filled with recipes, healthy tips, and free workshop dates. Ittner, a certified wellness practitioner, shared her tips for starting a healthy lifestyle in 2015:

- Set specific, measurable, attainable goals.
- Make your fitness routine part of your daily schedule.
- Prepare in a healthful manner.
- Stay positive and don't quit.