



Roanne Bank and other Group Power participants

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Full Body Lift

Women in Eugene gain strength all over the city ■ By Jes Burns

It's Tuesday night in downtown Eugene,

and a small group of women are beginning to gather in a mirrored studio at the Downtown Athletic Club (DAC). They pull out pink and purple step aerobics platforms lined up against the wall and find their perfect spot. The cavernous room begins to feel a bit more crowded as more women arrive. This scenario looks like the beginnings of a typical cardio workout, but then the women begin retrieving four foot black barbells from the corner and placing pairs of circular weights on the ends. Each woman has different sizes and numbers of weights.

As the women chat with each other, a techno version of the '80s hit "Heat of the Moment" begins to boom over the sound system. Kelly Reed, the group exercise director at the DAC, steps onto a platform at the front of the room and calls the class to order; the women grab their bars and place them on their shoulders behind their heads, and the warm-up begins.

Reed yells into her mic over the music as the women do squats, "You want to be safe. You want to be able to wiggle your toes." Her instruction on proper form suddenly turns stern, "If you can't wiggle them, your weight's not back enough!"

This is Group Power, a new class offered by the DAC. About 17 people are participating — and only two are men. This ratio is nearly the exact opposite of the actual

weightlifting room of the club, where men overwhelmingly dominate. One of the men in the Group Power class is the husband of another participant, Roanne Bank, a CPA who works in Eugene. Bank has been lifting weights "on and off for a while, but never consistently."

Lifting weights or performing weight-bearing exercise is key for building strength, reducing the risks of osteoporosis, losing body fat and fighting off clinical depression, medical studies have found, but women like Bank often don't stick with it.

She says she just gets bored with it and usually quits, but then she found Group Power — and, so far, it has kept her interest. She enjoys the class because she can come here with her husband. Having him with her, combined with the regular class schedule, gives Bank the motivation to make weight-bearing exercise a regular part of her life.

"The accountability factor is *huge*," says Kebrhea Kendall, a personal trainer who works at Carpe Diem, a health, fitness and wellness center near Skinner's Butte. Carpe Diem offers individual and small group sessions with personal trainers. If you can afford one, personal trainers are perhaps the best enforcers of the fitness law; they're waiting for you to show up, and you're paying them to wait for you to show up. "They know I'm here," says Kendall. "That's the biggest thing in maintaining a program: coming when

they're tired or have had a long day."

Working out with resistance exercises is an integral part of Carpe Diem's total fitness program. Kendall says the health benefits of resistance-based exercises are innumerable and unique. "What we do when we're lifting weights is we're placing a stress on the muscle, enough of a stress to force that muscle to adapt by building itself stronger."

In addition to the strength benefits, there's overall bone health. Kendall claims that weightlifting is perhaps the best thing a woman can do to prevent osteoporosis. Medical studies have found that weight training increases bone density, and this, combined with calcium, definitely reduces the risk of breaking bones as women age.

And as a bonus, the more muscle mass women have on their body, the higher their resting metabolism is going to be. Kendall says, "As we get older, our metabolism slows down. One of the reasons, perhaps the main reason, is once we hit 30 we start losing a certain percentage of our muscle mass every year." Muscles use the most energy of any tissue in the body. Thus the less muscle mass women have, the fewer calories they burn per day. That's why many women experience a gradual weight gain as they get older.

Knowing the health benefits of doing weight-bearing exercises and being held accountable for a routine is one thing, but if a woman is not comfortable with the atmosphere where she works out, it could be a deal breaker. Privacy is a principal reason women choose to go the personal trainer route at Carpe Diem. And having access to a full service fitness center without being grouped with men is a reason many women choose a membership at Oakway Fitness Center.

Oakway started out as an all-male gym in

the 1960s and eventually opened its membership to women. But the club never integrated completely. The general areas of the club are coed, but the pool (on alternating days) and fitness rooms remain same-sex. Kacey Miller is a personal trainer at Oakway Fitness Center, and she says the non-coed facility is a big selling point for women (who now make up a majority of members). She says women are looking to escape the meat market atmosphere of similar workout centers. Miller also feels women don't feel other sorts of anxiety there. "When people think of 'gym,' they think, 'I have to look a certain way or know what I'm doing.' We're a fitness center. They don't have to look a certain way. There's not a lot of pressure."

And much more so than at the DAC, the members of Oakway Fitness don't fit a body-type mold. People of all shapes and sizes work out there, and in the women's area right after work on a Wednesday, there are no fewer than seven women using the weight machines — many more, in fact, than are using the machines on the men's side. The women on the weight machines seem focused, not self-conscious in the least, and they're all breathing pretty hard. Only one of them is with a personal trainer; the others are making their way through the different machines independently.



LOCAL GYMS AND THEIR WOMAN-FRIENDLY ATTRIBUTES:

Downtown Athletic Club

- Group weightlifting classes
- Child care provided (at additional cost)
- Resistance and Balance class geared to mature adults
- Plush facilities

Oakway Fitness

- Mid cost range
- Child care provided (at additional cost)
- Non-coed workout facilities
- Group weightlifting classes

Carpe Diem

- One-on-one attention
- Spa-like environment
- Never a crowd
- Small classes

Curves (See editor's note)

- Relatively inexpensive
- All-women
- Relaxed, fun atmosphere
- Prescribed, time-conscious program

The Eugene Family Y

- Relatively inexpensive
- Child care provided (at additional cost)
- Family-friendly atmosphere; kids welcome
- Reduced rates for low-income teens and families