

Minding Your Body

Oakway Fitness Center may not feel as high-pressure as other gyms, but it feels like an Olympic training facility compared to the Curves located in downtown Eugene. Barbara Garner and Barbara Myers are work buddies who have been members of the all-woman workout center for nine months. They don't look or dress like the stereotypical gym attendee — they're here on their lunch break and are still wearing all their jewelry from work. Both are wearing shorts but no T-shirts or spandex. Instead, they don conservative knit shirts. Neither is wearing shoes.

Curves is an in-and-out gym in the most literal sense of the word. The "locker room" is nothing more than a cubicle shielded by a curtain, and there are no showers. Fast and convenient are the hallmarks of the business. "I like the idea of working your entire body in 30 minutes," says Myers, jogging frantically in place.

Curves is set up as a circuit, with hydraulic resistance machines and small, padded cardio platforms designed to work all parts of the body while keeping the heart rate up. The machines don't allow users to increase the resistance; instead, intensity is controlled by the speed, or "how hard," exercisers use the machine. Garner doesn't work quite as hard as Myers at each point in the circuit, and she hasn't had the same level of success. Myers is actually this Curves' "biggest loser." Through a weight loss program and working out five days a week, she's lost 68 pounds "and 40 inches" since

starting, she boasts. "Forty and a half inches," corrects Garner. "You can't forget that half inch!"

On the quad machine, Myers says excitedly that she can actually see muscle definition in her legs. Curves has experienced huge popularity and has provided a workout atmosphere that seems to appeal to women who have been discouraged by more traditional gyms.

"No makeup, no mirrors, no men!" According to manager Deborah Writesman, that's their unofficial motto. The resistance machines are arranged in an inward-facing circle, and the atmosphere is extremely social. "Everybody talks," says Writesman. "The first thing we do when someone is new in the circuit is introduce them to everyone else."

She says that when everyone is chatting and having a good time, they don't notice how long they're working out. Writesman seems to know the name of every woman who steps in the door, and this adds to the overall sense of community and comfort. And, when an employee knows a customer's name, the customer knows the employee knows when she doesn't show up. That, in itself, is a level of accountability. ■

Editor's Note: Curves is owned by Gary Heavin, who, it has been extensively reported and documented, gives financial support to organizations and clinics that are either anti-choice or refuse to teach teens any methods of birth control other than abstinence. Curves is a franchise model business — and many (if not most) are owned by members of the communities they serve. This holds true for the Curves in downtown Eugene. That said, franchise owners reportedly have wide latitude in their own beliefs and community support options.

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