

## REAL ESTATE

# A 'Personal' approach to dropping the fat

By **DAWN WOTAPKA HARDESTY**

Evan A. Kaplan thinks clients will go the extra mile for his business.

At least on a treadmill.

Kaplan heads the Personal Training Institute, a growing chain that bills itself as the \$14 billion health and fitness industry's only franchise offering individual personal training and nutritional counseling.

"Diets are wonderful until the time you go off the diet," said Kaplan, PTI's president and chief executive. "Exercise and nutrition: One without the other doesn't work."

That basic premise has helped the 19-year-old Jericho company open seven company-owned and six franchised locations stretching from Long Island to Maine.

It's looking to pump up even more.

Kaplan aims to open 25 locations by 2007 and 125 within five years. He just signed a deal with Donna and Mike Mincieli to franchise 17 PTI locations in New York City. The first should open this fall, with the others rolling out in the next several years, Kaplan said, adding that the Mincielis also run locations in Cedarhurst and Garden City.

PTI started franchising in January 2005 and charges up to \$200,000 for a location. That fee includes equipment – 19 strength

pieces and nine cardio machines – and guidance on running facilities that range from 2,000 to 2,500 square feet each.

Kaplan says his system makes the chain stand out. For about \$27 per session, clients meet with a trainer for 30 minutes two or three times a week.

"That's the easy part," he said. But what makes the business "truly special" is that clients also chat with a staff nutritionist for 15 minutes weekly.

"Our people typically are not gym rats. They're coming to us for specialized goals," said Kaplan, who left Senior Quarters after 19 years in 1999. "They don't want to be in a big box gym that can be intimidating."

The trainers and franchise owners don't have to have degrees or accreditation, something that might bother some in the fitness industry.

Kaplan wants it that way.

"They get their exercise beliefs from us," he said. "So they don't have outside influences."

Kaplan employs more than 200 trainers and the average studio works with between 200 and 250 clients at a time. If each loses a pound or two a week, how much fat has PTI helped melt away?

"I can just sum it up," Kaplan said. "A lot."