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Teens with trainers

A new program offers personal training for kids 10 to 17

By Avery Yale Kamila, Lifestyle Editor

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Tim Greenway photo

Trainer Margo Davies encourages Jonathon Olesen and his brother, Casey, as they work on their abdominals at the Personal Training Institute.

Forget iPods and Wii video consoles. This year's must-have accessory for tweens and teens may turn out to be a personal trainer. The American Council on Exercise named youth fitness programs one of its top predictions for 2007. And the trend will soon arrive in the local area.

Beginning Jan. 22, the Personal Training Institute in Falmouth kicks-off a six-week Fit Kid program. The program also reflects another exercise trend — small group personal training — and offers individual attention in an upbeat class setting. Each 45-minute session features a half hour of strength training plus warm-up and cool-down exercises.

With childhood obesity on the rise, school recess being cut in favor of more instruction time and fewer kids spending time playing outdoors, its no surprise that parents are looking for creative ways to get kids moving.

"I was really interested in the opportunity to develop a youth training protocol," says Margo Davies, a Falmouth mom and a certified trainer who will lead the program. "This approach to fitness has to offer nutrition, strength training and cardio."

The program is geared towards 10- to 17-year-olds and will emphasize body awareness, strength training and flexibility. Parents will receive private nutrition counseling, which focuses on serving appropriate portion sizes and making more healthful food choices.

Davies explains that children younger than 10 do not fit into the center's equipment and therefore are not eligible to participate in the program. She said this age group can still benefit from strength training by doing push-ups, sit-ups and other exercises that rely on the body's weight.

"There's a big difference between weight lifting and strength training," Davies says.

She explains that strength training is a monitored exercise and involves fewer repetitions at a slower pace. In contrast, weight lifting is a sport that focuses on lifting larger and larger amounts of weight with lots of repetitions and a more rapid pace. Strength training for kids, when done properly, is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics and other national health associations.

Brothers Jonathon and Casey Olesen of Portland have already been working out at the Personal Training Institute, where their mother is a trainer. Both boys signed up in hopes of building upper body strength for the spring lacrosse season.

"I can definitely feel it, because the muscles are being used correctly," says Jonathon, 16, who has been working out at the Personal Training Institute for more than two months. He says working with a personal trainer has helped him use each machine correctly and, in turn, maximize his workout time.

This is a sentiment echoed by Casey, 14, who says "after just one or two times, I started seeing results. My muscle mass was up and my weights were up. When it comes to lacrosse season, I should be a lot better. I'm also building lower body strength, so I should be able to run faster."



Tim Greenway photo

Davies will lead a six-week Fit Kid program at the Personal Training Institute. Each 45-minute session features a half hour of strength training plus warm-up and cool-down exercises.



Tim Greenway photo

Casey Olesen, 14, works on his biceps as trainer Margo Davies assists him at the Personal Training Institute in Falmouth.

Check it out - Fit Kids

WHEN: Six-week program begins Jan. 22

WHERE: Personal Training Institute, 202 U.S. Route 1, Falmouth

COST: \$150

FMI: 781-2225

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Casey says he appreciates the atmosphere of the Personal Training Institute, because it focuses on results rather than looks.

"In the gym at school, it's more to show off," Casey says. "You put on as much weight as possible to show off. But with personal training you can't do that. It's more healthy."

Such a structured and monitored work-out program is likely to appeal to both parents and kids alike.

"Our society has shifted away from being able to safely play in your backyard," says Davies. Like many parents, she worries about the growing childhood obesity problem, saying "the opportunity for physical outlets is diminishing. In school, there's limited recess and children's rambunctious behavior is often penalized by sitting inside for recess. It doesn't make any sense. So we're forced to outsource our children's physical fitness."

Davies, who has worked in the fitness industry for eight years, says working out with a personal trainer reduces the risk of injury from misusing exercise equipment and provides an edge of motivation that many people need.

"We live in a town that's highly competitive," Davies says. "So if you're a young person who doesn't excel in multiple sports it can be very intimidating. It's great for the athlete, but it's a double-edged sword for the non-athlete. A kid with any kind of body issues is going to wither. This is about building self esteem."

Davies hopes that through the program she will help already athletic kids improve their performances and boost the physical abilities and confidence of the students less interested in sports.

"It's such a hopeful thing," Davies says. "Kids are designed to move their bodies. Everybody's body wants to be healthy and thin. (The Fit Kid program) is all about getting kids off the couch. It's an option in the whole sea of what to do with my kids after school."

While no teenager will deny the desirability of maintaining a healthy weight, many may decide to go the personal training route for another reason: The cachet.

"It's cool to say I'm working out in the gym," Davies says. "But it's just like karate — they have to want to do it."

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