

### SPECIAL FEATURE

#### NETWORK MEETS ... GARY HEAVIN, CEO CURVES INTERNATIONAL

*During his recent trip to Australia, Network eNews took the opportunity to chat with CEO of Curves International, Gary Heavin, to gain an insight into how the Texan fitness entrepreneur 'takes care of business'.*

#### **Welcome to Australia Gary. What is the main purpose of this visit?**

There are two purposes; one is, I come here every six months and spend time with the franchisees and attend regional meetings in Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane before heading over to Auckland. The other reason I'm here is that we've created a new technology – the most advanced technology in fitness today – called Curves Smart which we have just launched in Australia.

If you've ever been to a Curves club, you'll know how the circuit works. Well, we've figured out a way to retro-fit the machines so that they're intelligent and they can recognise you, and as you begin your workout they can pace you to make sure you're going fast enough and far enough to get the workout that you desire. The system is programmed with your goals, and each machine will test your strength and your range of motion and it puts all that together to make sure that every time you show up it's like having a personal coach standing there. We currently have one million women using the new technology, and contributing to the information which is then furnished to research programs all over the world. It's called the Curves Study and is now the largest women's health study in history.

We launched Curves Smart in the US about a year ago, and have about 4,000 clubs there using the technology, and 600 in Canada. We also took it to Europe about four months ago, so it's now in England and Ireland and Scotland and we're starting installs in France and Spain, so we're making our way around the world with

it. It's really something much bigger than software – it's a personal coaching system. Everybody would love to be able to have a personal coach (trainer), but it's pretty cost-prohibitive for most people. We've created a personal coach for the masses, where everybody can get guidance and feedback and safety delivered to them through technology which has been programmed and designed specifically for their individual needs. The features are really three things; members get a precision-designed workout as opposed to a general workout; they get moment-to-moment feedback as they're using each machine, literally each rep, and they're challenged – there's a green light if you're performing well, a yellow light if you're not doing the proper range of motion or going fast enough to create the resistance, so this feedback keeps members working hard during their workout; and then thirdly, we give them a monthly report card that keeps them motivated for the long haul.

This sort of technology was missing in our industry, there's some apparatus out there which has a smart card to set the weight on your machine, but our technology actually watches you, and as you progress it increases the work so you continue to make progress. If you miss a couple of weeks, it actually backs off and reduces the work until you get back up to your standard, so it's intelligent technology – it's a huge breakthrough to help people get more results more efficiently and with less injury and we really think that engaging people at that level will make a tremendous difference in helping people stick with their goals, stick with the program until they accomplish



what they intended. The components of the technology have been out there, but nobody put them together until we did it with Curves Smart, and another benefit is that the insurance companies get a report which enables members to get a lower rate on their health insurance. Often the insurance companies are more likely to pay for the gym membership because they're actually seeing evidence in the data. So we think this is going to be a big breakthrough everywhere – to help people accomplish their goals faster and easier. By May of this year, most of the Curves clubs in Australia will have been fitted with this new technology.

#### **Is this something that the franchisees have to buy into?**

Well, they buy into it, but it's a pretty neat little deal – the way we structure this is that the franchisees pay a one-time fee, and then they raise their monthly dues about \$5 per month, not a lot, and that revenue generation actually pays for the technology – in fact, it not only pays for it, but it puts money in the franchisees pocket. We were able to do this because I put up about US\$20million of my personal money to mass produce the components so it would be

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affordable for the club owners. For about the price of a treadmill a Curves owner will retro-fit their club, to this state-of-the-art technology, and the members will pay for it.

**You're here for a week spending time with Australian franchisees, but as Curves is in 70 countries now, I take it you can't get round to visit all of them every year?**

You know, I'm a pilot and I fly my own jet which helps. We tend to spend time in the larger markets, I was in South Africa yesterday, where Curves has a hundred clubs and is the largest fitness operation in the country, I try to get there every year. It keeps me busy!

**Curves is the successful result of previous 'mistakes' that you made in the fitness industry, namely 'too-rapid expansion' (in your own words). What changed since the early days?**

It was several things, but that [overly-rapid expansion] was one of them. Several factors; for example, particularly in a women's fitness environment, you're creating a community, and if you have a manager of that community it's a little tougher to maintain the quality, so franchising, which is what I've done this time around, was the solution to that. You empower a local owner to build that community and in my opinion she just does a better job than a manager could do. The first time around I tried to get managers to do work that owners are best suited for. They have ownership, it's their business. Starbucks grew at about the same rate and about the same time period that we did, and Starbucks has managers. You can teach a manager to make a pretty good cup of coffee, but it takes an owner to care enough to create a community of support for these women.

**At one point Curves was opening clubs at a rate of one every four or five hours, somewhere in the world. Is this still the case and if so, do you intend to maintain this rate?**

We've slowed down that pace. When we were growing in the US, where we had the economies of scale, we were opening one every three hours for a two year period. Now we've slowed down to a more manageable pace of one per day, worldwide.

**With this many clubs opening there must be a certain percentage which does not**

**stay open. How does the closure rate of Curves clubs compare with other fitness chains which have managers rather than franchisees?**

It's kind of like comparing apples with oranges. The franchisee is able to open a gym for a fraction of the cost of a traditional health club. They're really considered small businesses, low-investment franchises. The way it's structured is that franchisees normally make their money back within 90 days – and if they've been open for two or three years and they've enjoyed a great return on their investment, but then grow tired of it or are perhaps not suited to it, we lose people in that way. If this happens, it's usually easy to sell the franchise to someone else, and it's usually a member who buys it, somebody who's passionate about the program, so we kind of facilitate that. We have a real small closure rate – it's much better than McDonalds, which is a million dollar franchise – so we're pretty happy with our long-term success. Part of the key was learning how to facilitate the sale to another qualified person and we've really mastered that in the past couple of years. Everybody, really, does well initially, and it's a good experience and if they want to stay in it for 10 years, that's great, and if they want to sell it after three or 4 we're happy to facilitate that. We have about 400 Curves clubs in Australia, and I'd say that we've closed no more than a dozen – and that's after they've made their money back, so it's not really even a negative for most of the people involved.

**So, one of the keys to franchise success must be having a pretty stringent interview process for the people who want to become franchisees?**

I learnt a long time ago that it was very difficult to predict who would be successful and who wouldn't. It's very surprising. The business is really about passion, and if you really want to help and serve people – the women in your community – that's a good trait. But you've also got to get business done, you've got to promote your business and sell memberships and maintain the services, so it's a balance of both passion and being a good business person. The real qualification is that we don't sell franchises to someone that has to go borrow the money or that's going to be 'under the gun' to meet certain numbers. People have got to

show up with enough liquid – the franchise sells for about AUS\$50,000 – so it's not a lot of money.

**What make Curves different from other women-only facilities?**

The difference is that we created a community where women are helping women, and it's really focused on service rather than profit, and because you put the service first, usually the profit comes as well. You can really get a sense when you go into Curves that there's a real welcoming environment, where you don't have to put on your make-up or lose ten pounds before you join the gym – we have a slogan 'No men, no make-up, no mirrors'. The traditional gyms are really driven by profit margins – they have to sell so many memberships to be productive. Our model is set up so that 80 per cent of the revenue comes from monthly dues that the members pay, so we're far more motivated in getting them to come in and use it. We learned a long time ago that if you can get them to come in three times a week your attrition rate, your dropout rate, gets extraordinarily low, so we try to keep our members rather than just sell the next membership. The business model is set up so that people are incentivised to get their members to come, to use it and to continue with the program as opposed to finding fresh new people and hoping they don't show up because it would get too crowded. So it's a different environment, and the motives of the owners are a little different than those of a chain – and women sense that – they feel good about going to Curves, people know their name, know what their goals are and if they miss a week we call them and encourage them to come back in, and remind them of their goals – so we're different in the whole approach to the market.

**This level of personal customer service is something at which smaller clubs are more likely to excel – so, what is the average number of clients of a Curves club?**

We watch the average very closely, and in Australia it's about 300 members, but we do have clubs with a thousand members, and in some of the smaller markets a Curves can actually make money with as few as 100 members.

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### **One hundred members who are coming three times a week, hopefully?**

Yeah – we work to make that happen!

### **So, these seem to be differences between Curves and other major gyms rather than between Curves and other women-only clubs?**

Well, even some of the other women-only chains are manager-run, and they have to get so many new members per month in order to stay ahead of the game. Of course, I was in the old gym business and you tended to make your money off the new sales that came in, and when I set Curves up I didn't want to go in that direction. I felt like you actually built into your business plan, in the old models, to discourage people from coming in and that's not what women needed. Women needed a place where somebody actually cared, and that's been the key to our success.

### **According to the American Council on Exercise (ACE), you have 'arguably done more to get inactive women exercising than any other fitness trend or organisation in the history of exercise' – why do you think that predominantly male-orientated fitness facilities aren't booming in the same way as women-only clubs like Curves?**

Pretty cool statement, huh?! If you go back to when we founded Curves I recognised that women were the second-class citizens of the traditional gyms. The equipment was designed to fit the average guy and when women would come in the guys would stare at their butts and it was an intimidating environment, so women just didn't come. So the industry had pretty much just written women off, they thought 'if we can't get most of them to come, we'll just focus on those that do' and then many traditional gyms ended up becoming more like night clubs than health clubs. So the need for women to have a place to go was great and I focused on meeting the need that was out there, in spite of the fact that the industry didn't understand what I was doing – it had pretty much given up on them. You know, it's funny, we probably had about a thousand locations before the industry started to even take notice, and the next thing you know we had five thousand and then ten thousand locations. It was like they were oblivious to the obvious. They started putting in rooms in their gyms where only women were allowed,

but these were kind of band aids, they didn't really meet the need. Women deserved their own place, which was specifically designed for them. There were barriers that kept women from going to the gym, and those barriers were intimidation and time – you know, women don't have an hour and a half, two hours to spend going to the gym if they've got kids and a job, so Curves 30-minutes program removed the barrier of time, and 'women-only' removed the barrier of intimidation. And the other thing was that women needed support in a way that men didn't; when men go to the gym they pretty much want to be left alone. Women borrow willpower from a friend, so we created these communities where they supported and encouraged each other, which was unique to the fitness world.

### **So, your first chain of clubs (prior to Curves) which employed managers was women-only as well?**

Yes, it was, but I thought that I could expand into the men's business, the co-ed, and that also contributed to the venture's failure. The men ran the women off, even if it was next door with a common entrance, women just didn't feel comfortable with that, so that was one of the mistakes I made in the past.

### **So when you opened that first chain, and it started off as women-only, were there any other women-only clubs on the scene, or were you the first?**

Yes, there were some. They were, however, the more traditional, longer workout – you go in and go on a treadmill and then go into the weights area, so women had to have time to use it. Once again it was one of those barriers that we were able to remove with the Curves model.

### **So you don't see any need to apply your entrepreneurial fitness spirit to the male sector of the fitness industry?**

Men have all sorts of place to go, and it's women who didn't have a place – so I'll let somebody else figure the men's stuff. I like working with women – they smell better, they don't throw their weights around and intimidate other members – I was in the men's business so I know! We don't have many fights at a Curves gym – no 'Roid Rages'!

### **Do you plan to expand your current range of services to include other aspects of fitness and appeal to a broader range of clients, or is**

### **it a case of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'?**

Well, let me answer that this way – as the CEO I have to make a decision of whether to sit back and enjoy our dominance, or to instead innovate. The challenge of innovating is that it's tempting to do something different, but we have such a well-established brand that I didn't want to go in that direction, so the challenge for me was to innovate but to do it within the brand, and this new technology, Curves Smart was a wonderful innovation that helped us to do what we were doing, but to do it better. I'm excited about that because I've been thinking about this new technology for about five years and we've been heavily investing in research; we're the most researched fitness and weight-loss program in the world, we invest a million dollars a year into pure research to find ways for women to lose weight and to get fit more effectively, so this technology allowed us to get them to workout harder, to get them more motivated, to give them accountability so that's the direction we've taken on this. Now, inside the business, the franchisees have an opportunity to offer weight-loss classes and we have a wonderful program now where members will come into a class with other women and for a period of time they'll focus on their diet and weight loss – it's based on books I've written over the years (Heaven has written two *New York Times* bestsellers) and our approach to dieting is just as unique as our approach to exercise, so we're not just a fitness centre, we're also a weight-loss centre – we're the first to really do both of those in the same place, really for the same price. It was always a natural that they fit together, but no-one was able to do it before us. We have a line of supplements that support our own weight-loss programs, so that's a profit centre for the franchisees and we have Curves-branded products which has become quite a large division of our company. Women can buy Curves apparel and shoes and a variety of things and the franchisees make a margin off of selling Curves-branded products. We also have co-branding deals with big companies like Avon – Avon did US\$70million in Curves products this year – and then we have a co-branding program with General Mills, the big food company; there's Curves cereal, Curves snack bars, Curves popcorn which you can find in any store in America and several other countries. But all of this really

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helps us to do what we do better, rather than being something 'different'.

**The reality is that in tougher economic times some gym members will drop membership because they view it as a luxury. How do you think the economic climate we are in will affect Curves, and indeed the fitness industry as a whole?**

Well, here's what I know about it. Couple of points; firstly, IHRSA did a survey and they surveyed members of the more expensive gyms, and 23 per cent of the survey participants said that they would not stop exercising but they would consider going to a lower cost gym and we're positioned as *the* low-cost fitness provider in the marketplace so we're well positioned to weather a recession. The other thing is, our target market is the fifty-year-old woman and she is the most recession-proof demographic. She and her husband are at the highest earning point in their lives, they're at their lowest debt, their home is usually paid for, the children are raised and educated, so our target demographic could not be better for recession. She's also got the time and the motivation to take care of herself, so we are weathering the recession quite well. We still have to deal with the negative – you know, every time you pick a newspaper up, you think the sky's falling – and in part, what I'm doing on this round-the-world trip is getting in front of franchisees and reminding them of the good that we have during these bad times and that if they focus on that and quit looking at the newspaper and the TV, then they're going to do just fine. I was in South Africa yesterday, and our revenues there are ten per cent higher in 2008 than they were in 2007. Same thing in England and France and in Canada – we have a lot of countries where we're just cranking along pretty good. In the US market, we're down 8 per cent, but it really doesn't have anything to do with our inability to sell a membership, it's just kind of a general malaise that's out there from all the bad news. If I can get them to be realistic about things rather than be fearful, they respond better – you know, taking care of business, because really, things are just fine for us.

**In which case, do you see the current economic climate as an opportunity for further growth or a threat?**

The people who have tried to copy us, they're going to have a more difficult time to weather a downturn in the economy. Curves is debt-free, we have no investors and we prepared for downturns by conserving resources and cash, and we're going to be around a long, long time, whereas the people who have copied us, who don't have the resources and the preparation that we have, we think that in a year they're going to have a tough time. I think that we're going to be the ones left standing when all this is done. At the end of the day, you gotta take care of business. I know how to take an enquiry, a phone call, and turn it into a member, and that's a system that I developed. I've been doing this for 33 years and I know how to take a guest through the sales process – we sell to 84 per cent of our guests that walk through the doors at Curves, and the industry standard is about 33 per cent – and those are systems that our franchisees have that the copycats never developed, so no matter how tough things get, we can always get a guest in and we'll sell to the guest and we'll keep the member because of proven systems that we've developed. I opened my first club myself when I was twenty, so I've been thinking about this stuff a long time!

**Do you see Curves as having an educational role in the area of overweight and obesity?**

Yes, in a word. With our research program we're leading the industry and figuring out the best way to manage weight and to be healthy, and we take the findings of our research and we put it into books and into seminars and a variety of things. We partner, for example, with over one hundred health insurance companies in America – United, Blue Shield, all the big ones – and when they send their insurers to Curves, we don't just give them an attendance report; Curves Smart is actually able to send them the data on whether a person's blood pressure is getting better, their resting heart rate is improving or their body fat percentage is getting better and they can actually see the data, the evidence that their investment in their insured is paying off by lowering their health insurance cost. We're also partnered with a medical program in America; we attend the shows where the doctors come

and we give them information on how to talk to their patients about how to lose weight, because it's tough for a doctor to tell a patient 'hey, you're fat' – but there's a way to do that, and we put materials together to help doctors do this. So, we have all sorts of avenues in which we're educating the public to make wiser decisions about their health and their weight.

**What are your key words of advice to anyone who is contemplating opening a fitness club or fitness franchise?**

You've got to do it with the right motive. If you're just going to do it to make money, don't do it. This is a business in which people need you to care – particularly in the women's business. There's an old expression 'People don't care how much you know 'til they know that you care'. A lot of gyms were founded by muscle-heads that like to work out, and they think it's easy money, and that's what's wrong with a lot of this industry. We've got a tough reputation out there for 'stand on your neck 'til you buy a membership and then hope you don't come'-type situations, and that's really a shame because we're on the frontline of helping people to avoid these chronic illnesses that are now epidemic, like diabetes. In Curves we have created an environment where people can understand that if you exercise for 30 minutes, three times a week, you don't have to have osteoporosis, arthritis and heart problems – if you're focused on profit, it's hard to get that message across.

If you focus on service, on meeting the needs of people, that's the first priority and the profit follows – there's no shortage of people looking for somebody who cares and so I think that if you're going to be in this business, show up for the right reasons – if you focus on service, then the profit comes and if it's done in that order there's a tremendous opportunity for people to be in this business. You know this 'express fitness' phenomenon that they say I started, is really predicated on that – you're a neighbourhood gym where people know each other and it's welcoming, so I think that's important.

**Thank you Gary, all the best for the future – and have a great time here in Australia. ■**

**PT NEWS AND LATEST RESEARCH**

**AWESOME NEWS FOR AUSTRALIAN-BASED PTS!**

Two of the industry's giants have teamed up to bring YOU the most cutting edge information in fitness and personal training.

That's right, as of 1 May Australian Fitness Network and PTontheNet memberships will be available to Australian-based personal trainers in one comprehensive, yet simple and convenient package.

And the best part? The joint package will be available at a very competitive price!

To find out more about this awesome revolution in Network membership, visit [www.fitnessnetwork.com.au/ptn](http://www.fitnessnetwork.com.au/ptn) or read the article on page 30 of your Autumn 2009 Network magazine which will have recently arrived in your letterbox. ■



**MENTAL FATIGUE 'TIRES' THE BODY**

Recent research from the UK has shown that performing a mentally strenuous task before undertaking exercise can have the effect of increasing feelings of exhaustion.

The researchers from Bangor University, Wales found that mental fatigue did not cause muscles or the heart to perform differently, and that the point at which participants reached exhaustion was more closely linked to 'perceived effort' than actual physical effort.

In the study, 16 participants were instructed to ride a stationary cycle to the point of exhaustion under two different

conditions, firstly when they were mentally fatigued, and secondly when they were mentally rested. The researchers tracked a variety of physiological measures during both exercise sessions, such as heart rate, oxygen consumption, blood pressure, cardiac output, ventilation and blood lactate levels.

The study findings showed that when they were mentally fatigued, the participants ceased exercising 15 per cent sooner than when they were mentally rested. Study authors Samuele Marcora, Walter Staiano and Victoria Manning concluded that mental fatigue impairs physical performance in humans and speculated that this fatigue may lower the brain's inhibition against quitting,



or affect levels of dopamine, a chemical in the brain which contributes to motivation and effort. ■

*Source: Journal of Applied Physiology*



**FIVE FOCUSES FOR FUTURE MONTHS**

With the year already a third of the way through, it's a good time to refocus on where you are trying to go this year and what will get you there. I invited Sherri McMillan, whom many of you will know from her presentations at Network-hosted events and her contributions to *Network* magazine, to share her tips for a successful year ahead in the PT world. With her partner Alex, Sherri owns NW Personal Training in Vancouver, Washington. She has previously been named IDEA Fitness Director of the Year and IDEA Personal Trainer of the Year, two huge accolades in the US. It was Sherri who inspired me to become what she termed a 'master trainer' when I saw her speak in Melbourne back in 1997. Her 1-day workshop on training shaped my career and she has been a hero to me ever since!

So here are Sherri's top five things to focus on now for a successful 2009:

**1. BE AT YOUR BEST**

You can't afford to be away or sick – your clients and classes need you! So get lots



of good sleep, eat well, drink lots of water and take your multi-vitamin to prevent feeling run-down. These simple everyday behaviours are the key to being positive, energetic and customer-service oriented.

**2. BE PRESENT**

If you can help it, try to not be away over the

next few months. In the fitness industry, it's important to be present and at your best in late January to March and September to November. The best time to schedule holidays in the fitness industry is April, June, July, August and late December to early January. Keep this in mind as you plan your 2009/10 holidays.

**PT NEWS AND LATEST RESEARCH**

**3. BE MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY PREPARED TO WORK HARD**

You might need to stay late, come in early or work on a weekend. You might need to put in hours of preparation work at home, juggle multiple tasks, and do things that aren't part of your normal responsibilities. You should be prepared to put in extra effort and not expect the return to show itself immediately. Be ready to find out what a client's needs are and to show them how you can help them. Be genuine and honest and highlight how much you will take care of them.

**4. HONE YOUR SKILLS NOW**

When you invest a lot of time and dollars to get people to check you and your services out, you need to turn them into new clients. What a waste it would be if an individual is motivated to call you or come in to check you out and their first impression is a poor one. Focus on customer service and outstanding first impressions!

**5. GET IN PEOPLE'S MINDS**

Now is the perfect time to call or e-mail those clients who haven't had a session with you for a while. Now is the perfect time to ask for referrals. When people think about

fitness, you want them to instantly think about speaking to you! ■

*Andrew Verdon, Dip. Ex Sci*  
 Andrew owns a successful personal training studio in Sydney. He combines a business background with over a decade of hands-on experience in the fitness industry. He also held the position of strength and conditioning coordinator for the 2004 and 2008 Australian Olympic sailing teams. For more information, call 02 9908 2499 or visit [www.beyondstudio.com.au](http://www.beyondstudio.com.au)

**NUTRITION NEWS**

**VITAMIN D TO FIGHT COLDS AND FLU**

The curse of the common cold and flu may be able to be warded off with vitamin D according to new US research.

While vitamin C is often cited as the vitamin for battling the sneezes and shivers, the latest study suggests that a daily dose of vitamin D will do the job. In the study of 19,000 people, nutritional habits and respiratory infection rates were assessed, along with levels of vitamin D, which can be found in tinned tuna, cereal and fortified milks and juices. Sunlight can also cause the body to naturally produce vitamin D.

Study author Dr Adit Ginde, from the University of Colorado Denver School of Medicine, said 'We don't want to jump ahead of ourselves, but our study provides support that lower levels of vitamin D are associated with an increased risk for respiratory infections, such as the common cold and the flu. And people who have pre-existing respiratory disease – like asthma and emphysema – appear to be at an increased risk for this association'.

Vitamin D has recently also been positively linked to protection for the body against colon cancer, multiple sclerosis, heart attack and stroke.

The participants were aged from 12 upwards, with an average age of 38, and the date for the study was collected from the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, which was collected between 1988 and 1994.

It was discovered that participants who had less than 10 nanograms of vitamin D per millilitre of blood displayed a 40



per cent increased likelihood of having had a respiratory infection, compared to participants with levels of 30ng or more. The researchers noted that this trend was consistent in all ages and ethnic groups, but also noted that those with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) had a higher likelihood of having a vitamin D deficiency (asthma patients exhibited up to five times the risk of respiratory infection, and some COPD patients twice the risk).

Ginde said, 'We still need to do the clinical trials that we already have planned to definitely say whether supplementation with vitamin D would actually reduce the risk we found. But I think we can say that most Americans probably do need more vitamin D for its effects on bone health, as well as for its general benefits with respect to the immune system'.

Spokeswoman for the American Dietetic

Association, Lona Sandon, said, 'There does seem to be a link because, when we're not getting enough vitamin D, our immune system appears not to function at its best. The best sources are salmon with the bones, or three cups a day of milk, but not many people get that. So I would say, get outside and expose some skin to the sun. Dermatologists don't always like that advice because they're concerned with skin cancer, but just 15 minutes a day at the sun's peak – roughly 11 to 1 – does the trick. However, if you live north of Atlanta, in the middle of winter, it's hard to get enough vitamin D that way, even if you're out in the middle of the day. So that leaves us with supplements in some form. And in that case, a general multivitamin typically has about 200 IUs [international units] of vitamin D, which is considered adequate.' ■

Source: Archives of Internal Medicine

**NUTRITION NEWS**

**McNEIGHBOURHOODS LINKED TO STROKE RISK**

A recent US study has shown what appears to be a link between the prevalence of fast food outlets and the occurrence of stroke.

Study author Dr Lewis Morgenstern, a professor of neurology at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, reported a 13 per cent increased risk of stroke among people who lived in neighbourhoods with a high density of junk food restaurants.

Presenting his study, which was funded by the US National Institutes of Health, at the International Stroke Conference in San Diego, Morgenstern said that whether the link was causal or not, has not been determined, and commented, 'The only thing we are certain about is, if you live in a neighbourhood with a high fast-food restaurant concentration, you are at increased risk'.

Looking at data related to stroke incidences in Nueces County, Texas, Morgenstern and his team found 1,247 cases

of ischemic stroke (whereby blood vessels become clogged) between January 2000 and June 2003.

The researchers then established that there were 262 fast food restaurants in Nueces County, and then further narrowed these down to determine how many were in each area. With this information they compiled a list of areas, ranked according to the number of outlets. The neighbourhoods in the 'top' 25 per cent of this list had 33 restaurants, and those in the bottom 25 per cent had 12.

When compared with the data relating to the incidence of stroke, analysis showed 'a 13 per cent increased risk of stroke in the top 25 per cent compared to the lowest 25 per cent' said Morgenstern.

Commenting on the findings, Dr Ralph Sacco, spokesman for the American Stroke Association, said 'It's interesting, but we don't know if it is causal'.

Drawing on the fact that fast food is often associated with obesity, which in

turn is linked to increased stroke risk, Dr Dean Johnston, a clinical assistant professor of neurology at the University of British Columbia, said 'This suggests that diet and lifestyle factors are important for stroke prevention'. ■

*Source: HealthDay News*



**GROUP EXERCISE & MIND BODY NEWS**

**RECORD INDUSTRY TRIES TO IMPOSE A \$100M TAX ON FITNESS**

In a desperate money grab, record industry bosses are trying to hike up the fees fitness centres pay for music – in many cases by more than a staggering 4,000 per cent – to plug a hole left in their pockets by declining CD sales. The proposal will see the fees the fitness industry pays for the use of music rise from \$1.5 million per year to a possible \$100 million per year, and will almost certainly mean an increase in gym membership fees.

This is a huge threat to Australia's fitness industry and we're going to fight it in the courts,

but we really need you to show your support by registering a protest at [www.taxonfitness.org](http://www.taxonfitness.org)

Spread the word – get your friends involved, talk about it online – anything that will help us tell the record industry bosses that you're not going to accept this unwarranted and unfair cash grab.

Don't think that you can't make a difference – EVERY voice of support needs to be heard, otherwise it will be too late. Support your industry, and protect your career, by registering a protest at [www.taxonfitness.org](http://www.taxonfitness.org) ■

*Source: Fitness Australia*



**YOGA IMPROVES MENTAL WELLBEING OF CANCER PATIENTS**

The findings presented in a new US study have suggested that patients with breast cancer may be able to improve their emotional wellbeing through the practice of yoga.

Lead researcher Suzanne Danhauer, from the Wake Forest University School of Medicine, said 'Given the high levels of stress and distress that many women with breast cancer experience, the opportunity to experience

feeling more peaceful and calm in the midst of breast cancer is a significant benefit'.

Forty-four women with breast cancer took part in the study, about a third of whom were receiving treatment for the disease for the duration of the study. The other participants had completed their treatment prior to the start of the study. Half of the group then proceeded to take part in a yoga program for ten weeks, while the other half was placed on a waiting list for the program.

**GROUP EXERCISE & MIND BODY NEWS**

Over the 10-week period the yoga group participants took part in regular 75-minute restorative yoga classes, utilising blankets and cushions for support and comfort. At the outset and conclusion of the study all of the women, in both the yoga and the 'waiting' groups, filled in questionnaires relating to their quality of life.

At the end of the study period, the yoga practitioners displayed bigger

improvements in mental health areas such as depression, positivity and feelings of calm and peacefulness, than their non-practising counterparts. The results of the questionnaires revealed a 50 per cent reduction in depressive feelings, a 12 per cent increase in positive and peaceful emotions and decreased feelings of fatigue.

Danhauer described the findings as 'very promising' and said that they would enable

the instigation of a considerably larger scale study. 'Evidence from systematic reviews of randomised trials is quite strong that mind-body therapies improve mood, quality of life and treatment-related symptoms in people with cancer. Yoga is one mind-body therapy that is widely available and involves relatively reasonable costs' she concluded. ■

*Source: Psycho-Oncology*



**KINNIE HO'S TOP TIPS!**

**G'Day to all Group Ex Instructors!**

It has been a couple of months since my last eNews contribution, so I trust your instructing year is well under way, and that you're teaching amazing classes, updating your skills and knowledge through continuing education and expanding your professional network.

This month I would like to address the 'Code of Ethics' and how it applies to us as fitness professionals.

A primary role of fitness professionals, personal trainers or group exercise instructors, is to motivate clients and increase adherence to exercise. Undoubtedly a 'good' instructor can have a significant influence on many people by designing safe and appropriate exercises to music to competently teach a class from start to finish. Along with the instructor's attitude and outlook, this can affect a member's decision to return to a particular class.

Could your professional and ethical conduct also enhance member retention and exercise adherence?

Occupations such as medicine, law, accountancy and engineering are increasingly concerned with professionalism.

The fitness industry is no different. It would be fair to say that most group exercise instructors have a concrete idea of what it means to be a *professional*. To cover every aspect of what constitutes professionalism would take more than this column allows, so we shall only consider the aspect of professional ethics.

Ethics are moral judgements of right and wrong. Your ethical conduct not only protects the safety and health of the clients you service, but also establishes you as a professional. Like many professional organisations, the fitness industry contains a code of ethics to guide behaviour, exclude unethical practices and promote integrity of the profession. For example, Fitness Australia has a code of ethics which requires its registered members to, '*discharge their duties and responsibilities, at all times, in a manner which professionally, ethically, and morally compromises no individual with whom they have professional contact, irrespective of that person's position, situation or condition in society*'. This code clearly outlines expectations to its members concerning their relationships and ethical responsibilities to clients and peers, and maintaining professional standard and integrity.

For example, one of the important

ethical responsibilities of a registered fitness professional is safeguarding confidential information relating to members or clients. Participants in your classes will often share personal information with you such as health-related issues; therefore it is important to maintain confidentiality unless the participant has given permission for you to release such information under agreed, appropriate circumstances.

Sound ethical practice requires responsible people with:

- knowledge of basic principles on which moral values and rules are based
- competence in decision-making skills
- ability to choose appropriate actions in varying circumstances.

The fitness industry, irrespective of your role, is all about working with people. Therefore a commitment to professional and ethical conduct will help you make good decisions and will see members, both regular and new, returning to your classes for a long time.

Until next E-News, stay healthy and happy to ya all Groovy Group Ex Instructors! ■

*Kinnie Ho*

**CLUB CORNER**

**IS THE ECONOMIC CLIMATE AFFECTING THE FITNESS INDUSTRY?**

The Australian Fitness Industry Survey (AFIS) is now in its second year and survey conductors, Ezypay received over 135 per cent more responses than in the first year of the survey. 620 owners and managers of health and fitness clubs across Australia

completed the 2009 AFIS (survey included 160 express type clubs that only answered questions relating directly to their style of club). The large increase in this year's responses confirms the interest in the survey and the need for more accurate information.

AFIS Project Manager, Simon Hall, thanked all the clubs that took the time to

complete and submit their responses, and thereby enabling detailed analysis and comparisons with last year's results. This comparison will provide a clearer and more accurate profile of the landscape of the fitness industry and how it may react to the current economic climate.

The full results and findings will be launched

**CLUB CORNER**

at this year's FILEX Convention, held at Sydney's Darling Harbour between 17 and 19 April, together with the results from the Members' Survey. The Members' Survey serves to provide a true understanding of the thoughts, feelings and perceptions our members have of our clubs and industry. By mid-February 2009 over 6,000 responses to the Members' Survey had been received, with 12 individual club/chains assisting with gathering more data, including Fitness New Zealand clubs.

Initial findings show a definite shift in some areas of the industry, though some of the information will not be greatly surprising:

- A very high response rate from the owners and managers of facilities – up slightly from last year – 84 per cent in 2008 to 89 per cent in 2009.
- 40 per cent of members are *very satisfied*

with their club.

- PPCA is still the most important issue facing the industry and has risen again in importance, moving dramatically from 44 per cent last year to over 70 per cent this year.
- On average NSW clubs pay more for yoga/Pilates instructors per class and less for club managers than Victoria and Queensland.
- 45 per cent of club members never use the club web site.

If you did not take part in the survey and would like to purchase a copy of the full

AFIS and Members' Survey findings, please e-mail [Simon.hall@ezypay.com.au](mailto:Simon.hall@ezypay.com.au) ■

*Source: Ezypay*



**FITNESS SKILLS GAP CONTINUES DESPITE DOWNTURN**

A shortage of fitness trainers qualified to deliver exercise programs to children still exists despite the economic downturn.

'There is an urgent need for qualified fitness professionals to deliver exercise to children', said Kit McMahon, General Manager at Service Skills Australia, 'The fitness industry is well-placed to offer solutions to the obesity crisis, yet there aren't enough people with the right qualification to fill the gap'.

There has been growth in the development of both facilities and programs aimed at children and adolescents. However, only 28 per cent of the exercise professionals registered with Fitness Australia are able to deliver children's fitness programs. It is estimated that 25 per cent of Australian children are overweight or obese and this number is increasing by 1 per cent each year.

Service Skills Australia, the industry skills council for the service industry, has recently completed a pilot of an Australian Apprenticeship program for Certificate III in Fitness, with specialisation in delivering exercise programs to children and young adults.

The program, funded under the Australian Government's Industry Training Strategies Programme, administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, is an important step to ensure that Australia has appropriately skilled fitness professionals to deal with the future needs of the Australian population.

'Training in the fitness industry is currently focusing on the higher profile occupations of gym instructor and personal trainer' Ms McMahon said. 'We would encourage students, jobseekers and qualified fitness professionals to undertake training in this specialisation'.

The qualification can be undertaken by completing training through a registered training organisation or through an Australian Apprenticeship. For more information on the apprenticeship program, Service Skills Australia can be contacted via [www.serviceskills.com.au](http://www.serviceskills.com.au)

The Children's Hospital Institute of Sports Medicine (CHISM) delivers an online training module for fitness professionals wishing to specialise in children's fitness. The Plan and Deliver Exercise for Children and Young Adolescents (SRF CHA001A) Certificate IV Specialisation Module is also accredited for 15 CECs with Fitness Australia. For more information, visit [www.chw.edu.au](http://www.chw.edu.au) where you can also click on the link to download the Kids In Gyms guidelines. ■

*Source: Service Skills Australia and Australian Fitness Network*

**IHRSA FINANCIAL INDEX SHOWS IMPROVED PERFORMANCE IN 2008**

The International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association (IHRSA) recently announced the release of the IHRSA 2008 Annual and Fourth Quarter Index, which demonstrates the financial performance of a sample of the commercial health club industry in the US. The survey of 14 leading US health and sports club companies, representing a total of 183 facilities, determined that commercial health club financial performance improved over the full year of 2008.

The IHRSA Annual Financial Index improved performance in revenue, membership accounts, and EBITDAR. Membership dues revenue increased by 3.4 per cent over 2007, while non-dues sales improved by 1.3 per cent. Total membership accounts increased by 1.7 per cent in 2008 and EBITDAR also improved by 3 per cent. 'Despite a less than stellar performance in the third and fourth quarters of 2008, clubs were able to improve annual results in 2008 over 2007 due to strong performance during the first and second quarters of 2008' said



Katie Rollauer, IHRSA Senior Manager of Research.

While health clubs improved performance over 2007, clubs in the IHRSA Index reported only a slight increase in total membership accounts in the fourth quarter of 2008 than in the fourth quarter 2007, up 0.4 per cent. However, total dues revenue dropped a marginal 0.7 per cent compared to the fourth quarter in 2007, while total non-dues

revenues were down by 5.6 per cent; 'It is not uncommon for members to slow spending on non-dues revenues during the fourth quarter when there is plenty of competition for their dollars and time during the holiday months' said Rollauer.

EBITDAR (Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, amortisation and rent) decreased by 1.6 per cent in fourth quarter 2008 compared to fourth quarter 2007,

indicating that clubs must continue to explore expense management options during the current economic climate. 'Sophisticated expense management will help carry a club through challenging times, when revenues may decrease or remain stagnant due to discounted services or reduced consumer spending' said Rollauer. ■

Source: IHRSA

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### SHARE A BITE TO HELP FIGHT DIABETES

More than 3 million Australians have diabetes or pre-diabetes, and worldwide 246 million people have diabetes (according to IDF Atlas). This April, why not join thousands of people across NSW to share food, fun and friendship by taking part in the 'Great Australian Bite' to help raise money for those living with diabetes in Australia?

Hosting a bite is as easy as 1, 2, 3 ...

1. **Register** to host a 'bite' anytime during April.
2. **Invite** workmates, friends or family to share a 'bite' to eat.

3. **Donate** – ask your guests for a donation.

A 'bite' can be held anywhere, at any time – in your club or training studio, a picnic in the park, a sausage sizzle at your local social club, a BBQ with friends or coffee and cake in the office – you choose.

Whether your bite is with colleagues and clients, a few mates or the whole town, you'll be making a donation to Diabetes Australia-NSW and doing your bit to support people with diabetes and help fund research.

With the ongoing support of our sponsor, Pinnacle Print Management, all funds raised from the Great Australian Bite will directly support Diabetes Australia-NSW's awareness,



research, education and advocacy programs.

To help the fight against diabetes, register today by calling 1300 136 588 or visiting [www.greataustralianbite.com.au](http://www.greataustralianbite.com.au) ■

Source: Diabetes Australia-NSW

### USE PEDAL POWER TO HELP CHILDREN IN POVERTY

In conjunction with Inspired Adventures, ChildFund Australia is offering Australians the chance to take part in an exciting and unique fundraising program – the ChildFund Australia Cycle Cambodia Challenge 2009.

ChildFund Australia has just seven spots now left on this adventure of a lifetime, giving you the opportunity to be a part of an enjoyable cycle challenge and to experience, first-hand, the development work which ChildFund Australia implements in Cambodia.

ChildFund Australia is an independent and non-religious international development organisation that works to reduce or eliminate poverty for children in the developing world. Using a child sponsorship approach, as well as public donations and government grants, ChildFund Australia directly implements programs in Vietnam, Papua New Guinea and Cambodia and manages projects delivered by partner organisations in Asia, Africa and the



Americas. ChildFund Australia is a member of ChildFund Alliance – a global network of 12 organisations which assists five million children in over 50 countries. ChildFund Australia is a registered charity and is fully accredited by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

On this 11 day adventure, which takes place from 12 to 22 September 2009, participants will cycle through stunning Cambodian countryside, as well as taking in the palaces, pagodas and French-inspired architecture of Phnom Penh. Riders will cycle through unspoilt Cambodian

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

villages, visit the magnificent Angkor Wat and spend a day at ChildFund Australia program areas in the remote Svay Rieng province, close to the Vietnam border.

To take part in Cycle Cambodia, participants will need to fundraise \$6,500 to cover travel costs and donation to ChildFund Australia. Approximately half of this amount goes to ChildFund Australia and will be used to fund the building of a new five-room primary school in Chouk Meas.

Over 500 primary age and at least 50 kindergarten-age children located in surrounding villages will benefit from this

construction. The school building will be equipped with basic classroom resources (such as desks, seating and blackboards) and a school garden will be established as a model for children to improve their nutrition knowledge and awareness.

Currently, many students must to walk up to 3kms to reach their school. As such, ChildFund will also be providing children with bicycles, especially girls who are more vulnerable and at greater risk when travelling long distances.

Funds can be raised in a variety of imaginative and fun ways, from

trivia nights, cinema evenings, online sponsorship pages, restaurant evenings and company sponsorship – the list is endless. If you register to take part in the challenge through Inspired Adventures' website at [www.inspiredadventures.com.au/childfund09](http://www.inspiredadventures.com.au/childfund09) you'll receive a full information pack including a detailed itinerary, fundraising tips and a schedule of key dates before the trip. To find out more, contact Belinda on 02 9262 7882 or [Belinda@inspiredadventures.com.au](mailto:Belinda@inspiredadventures.com.au) ■

*Source: ChildFund Australia*



**BOOK REVIEW**

**Book title:** Guiding Yoga's Light – Lessons for Yoga Teachers

**Author:** Nancy Gerstein

**Reviewed by:** Patricia Wigley

**RRP:** \$44.50 (Network Members: \$40 if purchased online at <http://www.fitnessnetworkcentre.com/products/showproduct.cfm?isbn=9780736074285>)

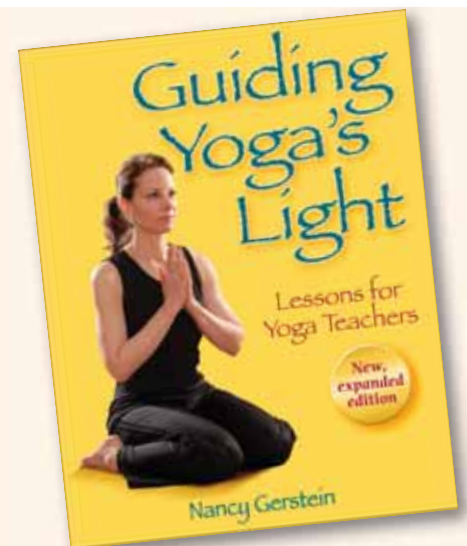
When this book came to my attention, I was immediately attracted by its aim – and I am loosely quoting the back cover here – to provide 'easy-to-follow yoga lesson plans'. Beginning with the basics of breathing and simple postures, it progresses to the physical and spiritual philosophy of the asanas and salutations and ends with 'lessons to bring clarity, calmness and relaxation into daily living'. Included are breathing lessons, suggestions for teaching the yamas and niyamas, the chakras and focusing on being in the present moment.

Gerstein trained at the Himalayan Institute as a yoga teacher (for more information see [www.guidingyogaslight.com](http://www.guidingyogaslight.com)), and I like the emphasis she places on teaching yoga as a skill to take into the

students', and our own, daily lives. The author reminds us, as teachers, of our roles as we share from our life experience. 'Be aware of how you live Yoga philosophy, knowing that practice begins every time you take a conscious breath, movement, or thought' and 'How you implement what you learn along the road will profoundly affect your teaching'.

I especially enjoyed the philosophy and suggested affirmations and quotes which are included with each segment and class plan. You could choose to use the plan as it stands or as a springboard for your own further exploration of the subject or to form the basis of a class plan. A small segment could form the core centre of a class or practice or could assist in planning a longer series of classes or course for your students.

A valuable segment covers 'Emotions' with practices to help 'Release frustration in the body' and for 'Embracing Change'. I also enjoyed the chapter on 'Lessons of the heart Centre' and the author's wise words 'When you practise asana, do it through your heart rather than through the brain's anatomical-alignment instructions. Recognise how that



changes the flow of prana'.

This book is very comprehensive and presented in an easily accessible style, and the photographs also support the context, clearly illustrating the asanas. It is the result of Nancy Gerstein's 30 years experience of teaching yoga. Whether you are new to teaching or have many years of experience it can serve as a valuable source of inspiration. ■