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Crunch time

Tarrant County folks add muscle to nationwide challenge that raises money for St. Jude's

BY CAROLYN POIROT
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Exercise class of the month

Do you think you can do stomach crunches for an hour straight, without stopping?

"That would be about 2,400 crunches, on average," says Tiffany Overton, manager of Lady of America Fitness Center in Mansfield. "I don't think I could do it, but a couple of my members probably could."

"I think I can do them for a whole hour -- unless I'm laughing too hard," said Carrie Exparza. "We like to have fun in our classes."

Exparza had just finished a 9:30 a.m. "Ab Attack" class, training for the Ab Crunch Challenge, a fundraiser for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, and she did look like she was having fun.

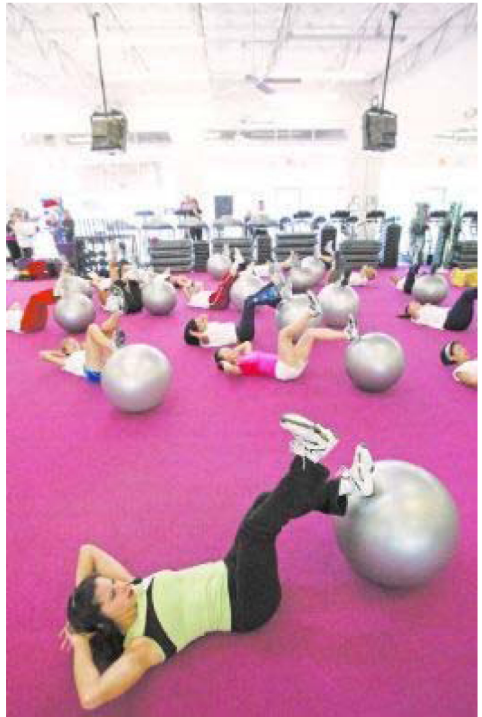
"I was so excited to be raising money for St. Jude's and get in better shape at the same time," Exparza said. "I'm doing it in memory of a friend's son, who was at St. Jude's for seven or eight months. The care there was just amazing. I would love for [the fundraiser] to just become huge."

The Ab Crunch Challenge started two years ago at two gyms in New Jersey and grew by leaps and bounds, with the idea of setting an official world record for a group of people doing crunches, all at the same time, all across the country. This year, more than 200 gyms participated.

Although there are established records for individual sit-ups, chin-ups, crunches and other exercises, there was none for a group until March 29, when more than 4,000 women, including several dozen in Tarrant County, set out to raise \$1 million for St. Jude. They are trying to set the Guinness world record for most abdominal crunches done by a group in one hour.

"With the figures we have so far, I have been told we can comfortably say at least 6 million crunches were completed nationwide during the Ab Crunch Challenge," national spokeswoman Alisha Marks said last week as the ab crunch count continued and participants collected money from sponsors.

"This was a fun way to help St. Jude's and educate women on the importance of core fitness," Overton said. "Muscles don't work in isolation. Crunches are important to help you build core stability and strengthen core muscles that help you burn more calories all day long."



Star-Telegram/Darrell Byers

Instructor Kim McKeller leads a recent abdominal crunch class at Lady of America Fitness Center in Mansfield.



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