

# Taking the Work Out of Your Workout

By Kate Edwards

Outside the Ventura fitness studio, winter was in full swing. The skies were gray, cold, and wet. Inside however, it was a whole different world. In the large, well-lit room, a group of women were heating things up as they shimmied, stepped, and clapped their way through a series of Latin-flavored dance and interval training routines. Accompanied by the pulsating rhythms of Caribbean, Brazilian, and Colombian-inspired music, students gyrated through such dance moves as the salsa, merengue, rumba, and flamenco. Although they had ostensibly enrolled in the class to get fit and perhaps work off a holiday pound or two, several of the ladies freely admitted that they were having a blast.

If you think that 'fun', 'sweat', and 'workout' are three mutually exclusive terms, welcome to the wonderful world of 'Zumba.' Named after a Colombian slang term for 'fast movement', Zumba is a relatively new fitness program that melds Latin-inspired music and dance with aerobic interval and resistance training. Developed by Alberto "Beto" Perez, a Colombian-born (and now Miami-based) fitness instructor, Zumba is an increasingly popular way to get a good physical workout while also having fun. In a Zumba class, the music is so infectious and the moves are so much fun that, as Perez himself has noted in the past, "...the terrific Latin rhythms in the program have taken the 'work' out of 'working out.'"

Anyone who has ever stopped going to the gym out of boredom knows that sometimes a workout just has to be fun. Occasionally, discipline alone does not suffice and some pleasure and enjoyment must be mixed in with the pain if we are to keep to the daily routine. The drudgery of an unchanging regimen soon wears thin and we find ourselves avoiding the gym in favor of something else, anything else! In order to keep fit through the years, sometimes we need to get off the treadmill, step away from the weight racks, and take up a new activity.

Ventura County has a wide range of off-the-beaten-path activities to offer anyone looking to shake up their workouts. From Laughter Yoga, to surfing, to hoop dancing classes, to Ballroom dancing with a partner, our region boasts a multitude of options for those seeking new and different ways to



stay physically and mentally fit.

One activity growing in popularity locally is indoor rock climbing. At both Westlake's Boulderdash and Ventura's Vertical Heaven, new climbers can learn the rope skills and climbing techniques they need to get to the top of each facility's 40-to-50 foot rock walls. At both facilities, novices can strap into safety harnesses and learn to crawl spider-like up 40-to-50 foot concrete walls dotted with colorful (and adjustable for variety) handholds. They do this under the watchful eyes of experienced instructors who hold the safety ropes and provide suggestions, tips, and encouragement during the climb. Afterwards, the instructors slowly lower the students back to the base of the walls where they land on a spongy, almost trampoline-like surface that is far more forgiving than the hard and rocky ground of the outside world.

But why learn to climb? Boulderdash owner Christiaan Luneberg ticks the benefits off, saying, "Climbing teaches you to focus. It makes you more confident, it makes you more flexible, and it teaches problem-solving." As we watched a young climber shimmy up about 45 feet of thick rope hanging from Boulderdash's rafters, he added, "And it is a full-body workout."

Both Boulderdash and Vertical Heaven offer a wide range of instructional and practice services to suit every age and skill level. Each gym has programs geared towards kids, such as birthday parties and climbing classes and camps. For adults, they also have evening classes, private instruction, corporate team building programs, and open practice times. Oh, and on Monday nights, Boulderdash also offers yoga classes, because, as Luneberg explains, "Yoga does well with climbing, as they are both all about breath and focus."

Next door to Boulderdash, but in a completely different world in almost every other respect, there lies another out-of-the-box fitness enterprise. Called Poleates, this studio offers adult women the chance to learn the intricacies of pole-dancing. And before anyone gets any visions of strippers gyrating wildly in a little studio in Westlake, let it be known that at this outfit, the dancing done is all about strength and athleticism.

Poleates is a Pilates and pole-dancing studio that seeks to give women a comfortable environment in which to learn an athletic and sensual style of dancing that, while it has less than positive connotations in puritanical America, is considered a competitive sport in Europe and Australia. Do not be fooled: pole-dancing is strenuous and requires incredible muscle and body control. To be a good pole-dancer is to be unbelievably strong, limber, and lithe. Strong—but not bulky—arms and legs and a very firm core are required in order to suspend one's body in space and perpendicular to the pole while completing gravity-defying moves. As one very fit 36-year old mother of two put it before a recent class, "I go to the gym every day, but this is a real work-out." As she did warm-up stretches on the floor, she added, "I have new respect for women who do this for a living."

Poleates owner Caterina "Cat" Gennaro (who is also the mother of twin toddlers and a world-renowned underwater and wildlife photographer) says that she opened the studio partially because she



wanted to create a warm, friendly, and nurturing environment where women could come and learn to pole-dance without feeling like they were competing with one another. The result is a dark studio with no mirrors on the walls (to keep class participants from focusing on what they look like) and a membership roster of approximately 100 women. Classes range from straight mat Pilates (all of the studio's

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instructors are certified Pilates trainers) to hour-long introductory pole-dancing classes, to pole-dancing classes of difficulty levels from 1 to 6. Each class is an hour-and-a-half in length and consists of 45 minutes of mat Pilates work followed by 45 minutes of pole work. Noting that she will not teach pole-dancing's sensual moves to girls under 18, Gennaro says that members' ages range from the high teens to the mid-50s. And she believes that they do not just come to gain flexibility, strength, and stamina. As Gennaro sees it, women do not get to express their femininity much these days; they do not get to be women. She points out that, "modern women have to be mothers, business people, entrepreneurs, etc," which leaves little time for them to connect with their sensuality. Poleates gives them a place to both get incredibly fit and regain some of that balance between being a woman...and being everything else.

Another sport that is all about achieving balance is fencing. Dayna Canada is someone who has become very adept at maintaining balance while brandishing a foil - or saber - or what have you. She is the owner of Ventura's Gold Coast Fencing Center. Having fenced for 13 years, 11 of them

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competitively, her most recent wins include a 2007 silver medal at the national North American Cup tourney, as well as a first place in her division at the 2005 United States Fencing Association's (USFA) summer championships.

On a day-to-day level, Canada, who attended the USFA's Coaches College, teaches fencing skills to would-be sword fighters of all ages. Through both her fencing center and the Ventura College Community Education Program, she provides her students with all the necessary gear and then leads them through the basics of the sport with the three implements used in modern fencing: the foil,

the epee, and that classic Hollywood dueling implement, the saber.

Beyond the basics, Canada helps her students to improve their speed, agility, and stamina while also gaining better coordination, sharper reflexes, and yes, improving their balance. But fencing is also a very mental game—so much so that it is often called "physical chess." The successful fencer has to have the focus, concentration, self-discipline, and problem-solving skills to gauge their opponents' skills, tactics, and strategy. And then they have to have the self-confidence to believe in their own strategy and skills. Canada has a quote written on the wall of her studio that sums it up the best: "The epitome of fencing is to convince your opponent to place his chest on your point."

Perhaps we should amend that idea to say, "The epitome of a good workout is one that convinces us to do it every day." A well-tuned mind and fit body are key components of a full life. It takes a challenging but entertaining workout routine to maintain that body and mind. Endless spinning classes and hundreds of miles on a treadmill in front of a television screen are not going to do it: That is not fun: and life is too short not to have fun! **AGENTS**