

THE HAWK EYE

Training to keep a fitness resolution



Matt Ryerson/The Hawk Eye

Fitness trainer Liz Modrell of Sperry works with Darwin Bunger of Burlington Friday at Sports Worx fitness center in Burlington. Modrell operates Uniquely Yours Personal Fitness and Training.

Local trainer offers advice to keep working out and watching diet.

By WILLIAM SMITH

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It's a familiar story. That New Year resolution to lose weight transformed into a shiny new membership at a local gym, and the only thing standing between you and a new body is a lack of determination.

Fast forward to a couple of weeks, and the new gym membership doesn't seem so snazzy anymore. The weights feel too heavy, the aerobics are too painful, and the craving for a butterscotch sundae won't subside.

Quitting suddenly sounds like a pretty good idea.

"Everyone says, 'This is the year I'm going to get in shape.' That lasts two to four weeks, and then they are gone. They see all this fitness equipment, and they are overwhelmed," said Liz Modrell, a personal fitness trainer for the Burlington area. "My job is to help people understand."

Modrell has been a certified personal trainer for 28 years and started her own Sperry-based company, Uniquely Yours Personal Fitness and Training, in 1991. Currently serving more than 50 clients in the Burlington and surrounding rural areas, Modrell is one of the few area trainers who makes house calls.

"Most of my customers come from word of mouth, and I see a lot of them three times a week, depending on what their goals are and what their motivational level is," she said.

Potential clients are required to fill out a detailed, multi-page questionnaire that probes into their daily habits and motivation. From there, Modrell develops a workout program that best suits her client.

"A lot of people are only going to put in one day a week," she said. "Some people start out very slow. I've had people who can't get out of a chair."

Personal training is a service most people associate with movie stars and upper-class salaries, which Modrell said feeds into the idea that exercise for most people is a self-service activity that requires little more effort than a daily chore.

She said reality television shows like "The Biggest Loser" only reinforces the idea of quick weight loss.

"I get a lot of people who watch 'The Biggest Loser' and say that's what they want to do," Modrell said. "But those people work out four to six hours a day, and all the food they need is there. The people I train have real lives and everyday commitments."

While her routine varies for each client, Modrell does have a set of guidelines she follows. She considers proper nutrition to be even more important than exercise, and each client is required to keep a journal of what they eat.

"My big thing is journaling," she said. "They need to journal everything they eat, their workout routines, how much sleep they got."

Since Modrell uses a combination of strength training and aerobic workout with free weights, she doesn't stress losing weight. Clients are weighed every six weeks, but how much the number on the scale goes down really isn't an issue. Muscle weighs more than fat.

"What I try to stress to people when they work out is how much energy they have," she said. "The weight loss doesn't happen until all the stuff on the inside happens."

Modrell said the biggest issue many people have with working out in public is simple embarrassment over their weight. That's why many choose to work out with Modrell at home, utilizing equipment that formerly served as clothing racks.

"They feel at home. They feel comfortable," she said. "A lot of people feel like they have to get in shape before they go to the gym."

Personal fitness has been a passion for Modrell since she was in high school, where she was one of the few girls who visited the weight room on a regular basis.

"Girls weren't allowed to use the weight room. We had to sneak in and get thrown out," she said with a laugh.

Shortly after graduating, Modrell entered the world of competitive bodybuilding, a hobby she continued for more than 10 years. There was never any money in it, but there were a few trophies.

"It took a long time to get respect in the gym. That was something women didn't do. It was very hard," she said.

She left the sport when steroids became a common place muscle booster.

"Drugs were getting out of control in bodybuilding, and I was competing against women with moustaches," she said. "It wasn't the natural way it should be."

Modrell recently appeared on the "Paula Sands Live" show shortly before Halloween, demonstrating how medicine ball techniques can be used on a pumpkin.

"We even had pumpkin smoothies," she said with a laugh.

For Modrell, it's all a means to the end of living a healthier lifestyle. Instead of concentrating on how exercise improves the body, Modrell is more concerned about exercise changes her daily life.

That's something she tries to impress on her clients as well.

"It's an investment in your future," she said. "There are so many diseases and health problems you can get when you're out of shape."