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To the extreme

By KRISTA KIELSMEIER
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Nearly 100 people attended fall orientation Sept. 6 at Farrell's Extreme Bodyshaping in Altoona. About three-fourths of those attendees went on to finish the 10-week program that included three days of kickboxing and three days of training with resistance bands per week, along with a detailed nutritional plan.

The orientation featured testing to set a baseline for improvement. Participants were placed in teams with coaches to help track their progress. A few of the coaches were past winners of Extreme Bodyshaping's \$1,000 prize for the most improved member of a session at each franchise.

The contest evaluated the before and after pictures for each person, plus their gains on sit-ups, push-ups, the sit and reach and the mile run, as well as weight and body fat percentage. Arm, chest, waist, hip and thigh measurements also were taken at orientation.

Lance Farrell opened his first Des Moines gym in 1989 and founded Extreme Bodyshaping in 2001. He had been an elite tae kwon do athlete and incorporated martial arts into his fitness classes.

Extreme Bodyshaping has expanded to a dozen locations in Iowa and one in Nebraska.

LeaKol Gardner brought the franchise to Altoona in summer 2007, about a year after she had completed her 10 weeks in Ankeny. Gardner had worked as a customer service representative in Urbandale, but the success she gained through Extreme Bodyshaping led her to make a career change.

She missed only one class during her 10-week session.

"It kicked in at week five," Gardner said, and by week seven she started to see dramatic differences in her body's appearance.

As Gardner explained at the fall orientation, success in the program goes beyond just the number of pounds lost. At five-week testing, participants didn't step on a scale. Gardner said she didn't want anyone to get discouraged. Some people even add enough muscle to gain a few pounds.

Gardner lost 9 pounds in her initial session of Extreme Bodyshaping. Her advances were more



Michael Rolands/Index Herald Staff
Ben Kolo of Colfax throws a punch while warming up at the start of a kickboxing class at Farrell's Extreme Body Shaping in Altoona on Nov. 12.

My time in Extreme Bodyshaping

"Never again will I have to run against my will," I announced to my parents after my last softball game for Union High School in La Porte City.

Four years of four sports had been a grind. I competed in volleyball, basketball, tennis and softball, and the summer, of course, featured all four of those sports as every coach wanted some of my attention.

The end of my high school sports career meant I could devote more time to sleep and ice cream. Somehow, I didn't gain much weight, until I moved to Altoona to work at the Herald-Index. I started in early June, and my apartment didn't open until

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evident in final testing. She lost 6 percent of her body fat and added 57 push-ups per minute. Gardner also trimmed more than five minutes off her mile run.

"I was just totally amazed," she said. "It's very challenging. I never would have thought I would put on a pair of gloves and hit everything."

The next Extreme Bodyshaping classes begin in January, which is a popular time to enroll after the busy holiday season.

"Instead of looking at pounds, they should join an exercise place and become healthier," Gardner said. "You can't look at only the weight to determine if you're healthy."

Extreme Bodyshaping in Altoona has about 25 instructors who lead classes. Some also serve as coaches, who hold their teams accountable. Early in the program, many new enrollees were emphatic about informing their teammates ahead of time if they were going to miss class. They didn't want their peers to think they had quit, when they really were just on vacation. Classes in Altoona started at 5 a.m. and concluded around 9:15 p.m. Each class was about 45 minutes. Kickboxing started with a brief warm-up before participants started hitting the bags. The band classes offered different levels of resistance, and the days alternated between upper and lower body workouts.

At the end of the program on Nov. 15, guests gathered at Toad Valley Golf Course in Pleasant Hill for a celebration. Earlier that day, athletes finished their final testing with a mile run in a swirling wind.

The top teams won awards for team challenges that were held throughout the 10 weeks. Teams also were honored for overall improvement. Some teams, on average, had members double their sit-ups and push-ups and lose more than 10 pounds.

Following the September orientation, a few more people signed up for Extreme Bodyshaping to push the number of participants above 100. That meant \$1,000 prizes could be awarded to both a male and a female.

Ben Kolo, 37, of Colfax won the male award. He gained weight during the program and capped it off with an impressive 102 push-ups in a minute. Kolo works as an electrical contractor and was enrolled in the 9:30 a.m. class. He said Extreme Bodyshaping had been a great help for his diabetes, and on some days, he doesn't have to inject any insulin.

Lynnette Plummer, 39, of Pleasant Hill braved the 5 a.m. class with her fiancé, Chad Austin. She won the top prize for females in the session after losing four inches on her waist. Plummer said the coaches and camaraderie of Extreme Bodyshaping motivated her to success, and she plans to use the money for her honeymoon.

Many of those who completed the 10 weeks will continue on with classes in the maintenance program. Maintenance classes will be held throughout November and December, before the next new enrollees are accepted.

"I wish I would have done it a long time ago," said 41-year-old Kristina Johnson of Des Moines. "It was well worth it."

She, like many others, had to be patient as she waited to see some progress.

"What surprised me was the results if you followed it," Johnson said. "I didn't see results right away. I felt it before I saw it."

For more information, visit www.extremebodys shaping.com.

July. I commuted from my parents' house in Johnston and promptly gained 15 pounds on my mom's cooking.

I had heard about Extreme Bodyshaping on several drives from my previous home in Sheldon back to the Des Moines metro area. An Omaha radio host raved about his experiences in the class. If I was going to get in shape, I wanted to be in a program that was immersive. Six days a week was good for me, and I quickly grew to appreciate the close-knit atmosphere of the classes. I signed up for 6 a.m. to avoid evening city council and school board meetings. The flexible schedule meant I could adjust my time as necessary, and I didn't miss my first class until Election Day.

Prior to class, I lost 10 of the pounds I had gained by sticking to a diet of PowerBars and Wendy's chili and baked potatoes. The Extreme Bodyshaping handbook informed me that those potatoes were off limits. The diet instructed participants to eat more often, but in smaller amounts. Sunday was a free day where I could eat anything I wanted. That day also was scheduled to be a break from athletic activity, although I played basketball with an office team at Altoona Campus. Due to my unpredictable schedule as a journalist, I didn't follow the diet. As I continue on with maintenance, I will focus more on my eating, because that will lead to greater improvement.

The initial testing revealed how far I'd fallen. It can be discouraging when you remember what you were once capable of and then realize that, solely due to your own apathy, you have slipped. Still, I don't think I will ever be able to duplicate the intensity of two-hour nightly basketball practices that were the staple of my winters in my younger years.

After my 10 weeks, I'm on the right track. I doubt I'll ever be in as good of

shape as I was in high school. I improved my push-ups by 30, my sit-ups by 13 and cut a little over a minute off my mile. I weigh exactly the same as when I started, but I feel my legs and shoulders are much stronger, and my waist is one inch smaller. I would like to thank my coach, Brad Wade, for his never-ending supply of energy. I look forward to continuing with the program and my quest to return to my high school self.

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