

## **Fitness Aims for the Outdoors**

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Tired and bored with staring at walls and walking treadmills, Southern California fitness buffs are heading for the outdoors en masse -- kayaking, rock climbing, canoeing and bicycling are becoming big business. And while specialized clubs are opening and signing new members, established ones are adapting their programs to provide *training* for out-of-club activities rather than simply offering indoor work-outs.

At The Sporting Club in Irvine, the new focus is on cross-training. "We're really seeing a big emphasis on training for multiple sports," says Fitness Director Celeste Budd. "People are mixing it up and the majority of new programs and equipment have to reflect that." She adds that program requests and work-outs are becoming more sports-specific and that cross-training emphasizes that. "They're coming in and saying 'I want to play softball better,' People are bringing their lifestyle into the gym."

As a result, the business of fitness-related business are making changes in services and clientele as well as personnel. This phenomenon represents an entire change of mindset regarding the idea of fitness -- with a focus on activities more in tune with everyday life. And this evolution is being felt even within more traditional activities such as weight training and aerobics.

"People who like the aerobics want more step classes and more dance emphasis," Budd says, adding that many of these programs have been modified to include this new focus. Newer programs include cardio-boxing (for males and females), fencing, rock climbing, self-defense, slide and step classes, and muscle ballet, as well as pre- and post-natal classes.

This change is also notable at The Sports Club in Irvine, where working out takes on a whole new meaning. Many of the newer programs focus on cross-training as well as corporate training, better known as "sports-related management training." According to Fitness Director Jeff Diltz, management training in the gym covers everything from sales training to management training to promotional workshops, with a fitness/workout/team orientation.

These management sessions attempt to teach practical lessons that can be applied in life, play and work. "We develop a game or activity that forces them to interact and work together as a team," says Diltz. "For example, everyone knows how to play basketball, but our version is different. Player 1 can only dribble, player 2 can only shoot from the outside and player 3 can only rebound. That makes it a little harder and forces them to focus on their role and work as a team."

The outdoor specialization has been a big part of The Sports Club's philosophy as well. They offer ski conditioning programs and a ski simulator, as well as play host to an indoor triathlon. Like The Sporting Club, rock climbing, racquetball and squash are also part of their services. Still, it's the more exotic programs that are getting the attention. "Facilities like ours are being used differently. They're used to better the member's recreational activity; whatever they like to do, they're using us to help them do it better. Basically, they're using the club as a training facility," Diltz emphasizes. "It's definitely where things are going."

On the business side, this kind of redirection means less in new equipment investment than it does in personnel investment. And that requires hiring new teachers or training the existing trainers to teach the new classes. "It requires trainers who understand what team dynamics are, what it's like to come out of giving birth, someone who has some kind of dance activity training, or any other specialty," Budd says.

It also illustrates that people are going back outdoors to enjoy nature and get fit. In response to this growing phenomenon, one such club, ROCKREATION in Costa Mesa, opened in September and has already found a large membership among executives, families and skilled climbers. With more than 10,000 square feet of climbing terrain of caves, towers, plateaus and sheer cliff walls, this newest playground may be the largest indoor rock climbing facility in the country.

According to Manager Rebecca Rusch, ROCKREATION, appeals to all levels of climbers and is particularly well-suited for families looking for something to do together. "The first initial members were hard-core climbers, but since then we've had all kinds of people in here. Families get into it because they can climb together and kids love it because they're natural climbers," she says.

The result of all this outdoor training is that people are actually getting out, and those businesses that provide recreation activities are growing enormously. Diltz stresses this as well. "Outdoor recreation is growing so fast. Mountain climbing, rock climbing, ocean kayaking, all of it."

Although the Newport Aquatics Center has been around for more than seven years as a national and international training site for rowing, kayak and canoe teams, class attendance and boat, kayak and canoe rentals have increased markedly. According to Director Nora Seager, public equipment rentals have jumped more than 60% in the last year. In addition, "Classes have been steady," she says. "There's been no winter drop off."

The Southwind Kayak Center has had its pulse on this trend since early last year. Partners Doug Schwartz and Joanne offered short kayak excursions for years before they decided to open up a small retail store to meet the demand for more kayaking equipment. Today, Southwind offers 30 kayak excursions per year and has more than 70 rental boats, boasting the largest selection of kayak equipment on the West Coast.

Indeed, Schwartz estimates that business has expanded at least 40% in the last year. "We began as a backyard business eight years ago and now we have a 4500 square foot facility," he says. "You bet people are getting out."

Southwind perhaps epitomizes the general fitness trend for the '90s: fitness becoming practical and fun. But this newest wave in the fitness world is more than a trend: it represents a new way of life for many who have been seeking an alternative to working out in a box. "They don't just want to do it anymore," says Budd. "It's a much more functional approach. The emphasis now is on a holistic workout."

Rusch concurs, adding, "People are trying to do something new and get off the LifeCycle. They're tired of running around like mice."