

Seniors find success working with personal trainer

March 10 2009, By Dee DePass

Craving a little attention? Need to spruce up that new year's resolution? Before you freshen up your excuses, check out Don and Dorothy Ritz. Then consider getting a personal trainer.

Don, 77, and Dorothy, 81, let me join them during their 16th session with trainer Jeremiah Jones at Fitness First Personal Training in Chaska, Minn. The by-appointment sessions are not cheap - some packages exceed \$1,000 - but the results can be worth it.

When I walked in the door, Don was dangling from steel and chinning up like a champ one-third his age. Fast up and then slowly down. Then slowly up and quickly down. Jones stood glued to his side, spotting, counting and cajoling.

Jones next ushered Don to a split or "iso-lateral" Nautilus leg press. There, the 165-pound Don used one leg at a time to push a weighted 245-pound plate. At Jones' instruction, Don alternated between counts of four and 10, a trick that really fired up his glutes and quads. Next Jones moved Don onto a lat pull-down machine weighted with 22 { pounds per arm. Soon Don was grimacing but conquering the strain.

"It's very beneficial to have a trainer," Don said. "Left to myself, I'd go home the first hint of getting tired. But they are always pushing you the extra mile. Sometimes they work us pretty hard and you say, 'Why am I doing this?' But afterwards, you feel great."

To get there, Don and Dorothy march through about 15 different machines twice a week under Jones' close [supervision](#). When I spied Dorothy, she was shrugging 115 pounds as Jones coached her to lift her shoulders up for five counts, hold for five and down for five.

The woman weighs only 141 pounds. And she's 81 years old.

"We call this the Fab Five," said Jones, carefully lifting the initial weight for her and then letting her take over. He then moved her onto a [rowing machine](#). "She's at 95 pounds today and she'll be at 100 pounds next time. She's very impressive. She's a very good rower," he said, noting the blue chart where he had documented her weights, repetitions and speed performed at each machine at every session since Jan. 2.

Their progress is amazing. Dorothy lost two dress sizes and gained enough muscle mass that her total body weight stayed the same. That's quite a feat, considering that you lose 2 pounds of muscle each decade after age 35 unless you work at it.

Impressed by Dorothy's results, I decided to try it. I last had a [personal trainer](#) about three years ago. Last week exercise physiologist and First Fitness owner Steve Ritz (son of Don and Dorothy) showed me specialized machines I had never seen and worked my legs, glutes and shoulders in completely new ways.

On one machine, each shoulder had its own weight, so each worked at its own pace. "These are iso-lateral machines," Ritz explained. "We all have a favorite or dominant side and our goal is to balance that out. That is easier to do if the weights (for each side) are not tied together." The iso-lateral concept was embedded in most of his machines, including the hamstring curl, chest press, lat pulls and leg press.

When machines weren't working, the trainers were. Jones pressed down

as Dorothy raised her arms, providing the resistance that helps her become stronger.

Deephaven, Minn., resident Ann May also likes the results she sees with a trainer.

"My goal was to strengthen my (body), to be able to sail without falling down. I had the feeling that if I took a misstep I'd be going overboard." Now her trainer sits on her legs as she lies on a bench, on her stomach, and does reverse sit-ups.

"I'm up to 17 now," she said. "When I started I could only do five. It's amazing how fast you get up there. He's got me holding at the lift for 30 seconds on the very last two. I want to sock him. But it's good for me. Now I don't have trouble sailing."

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