

ONLY THE STRONG SURVIVE

Extreme fitness programs turn wimps into winners.
 BY JENNA KASHOU

Harder. Better. Faster. Stronger. Has this become the new American fitness credo? Throughout the area, gyms and clubs of all stripes are offering results-based, high-intensity programs that cater to power lifters and novices alike. The good news is that with so many options, there is a regimen out there for every lifestyle.

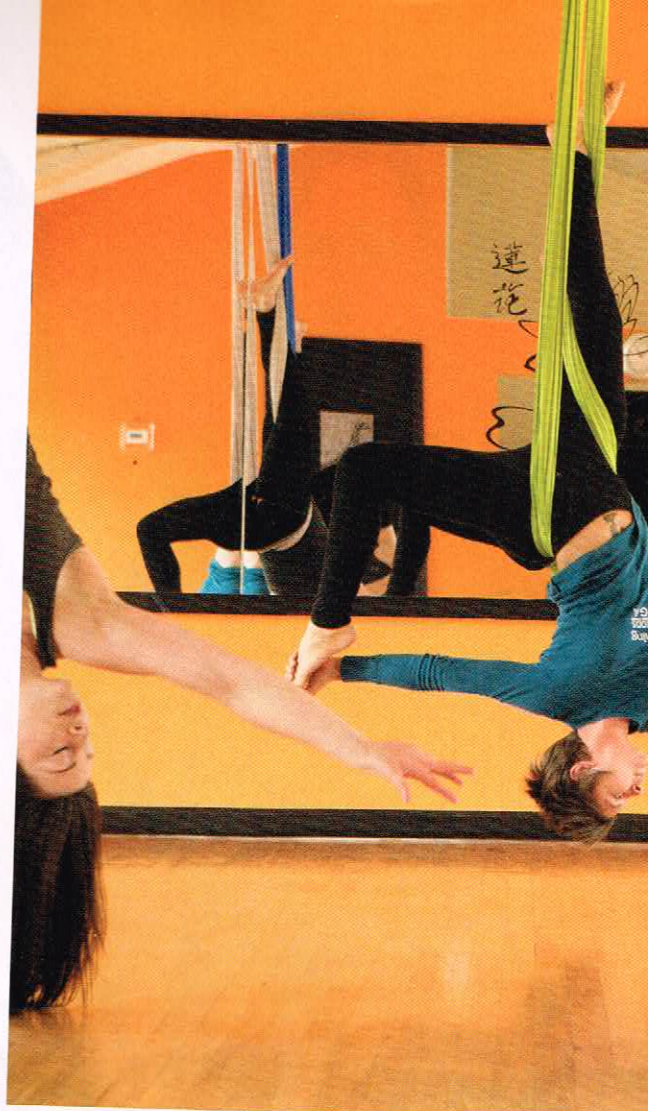
But why the push to ... push?

"People want to feel like they are getting their money's worth if they are going to pay someone to lead them in a workout," says trainer Tony Langtimm, who runs **ASCENT GYM** (1034 N. Fourth St.), an accelerated program that develops strength, endurance, speed and agility. "There is always going to be a new fitness trend, but we should just perfect what's out there rather than always try to do something new and different."

MONKEY BAR GYM (173 N. Milwaukee St.) also supports getting back to the basics. Clients work out without mirrors, shoes or machines in boot-camp workouts. Trainers use weights and tools like medicine balls, kettle bells, power wheels and bands to lead



BARRE BEE FIT pushes you to get a lot out of a little.

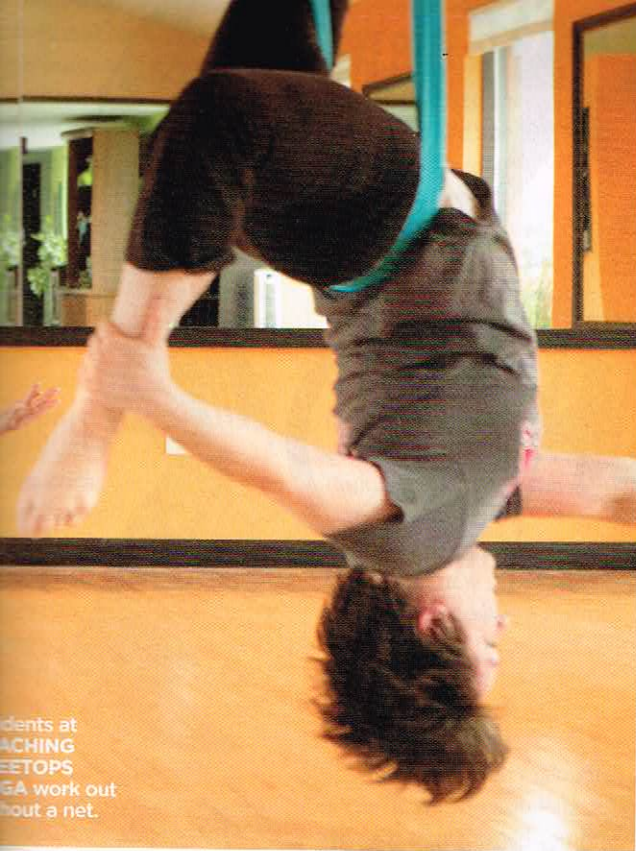


clients to a stability-strength-power progression. "We schedule, log and assess performance to help clients meet their goals and see results fast," says owner Jeff Winzenried. "They want to be held accountable."

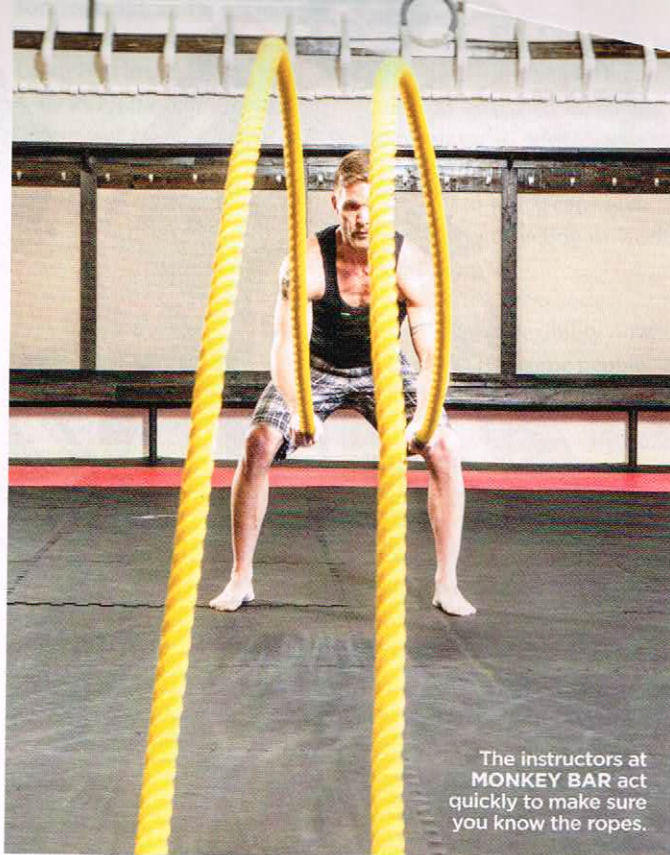
Gabe Ceci, a former gym slacker, has been a member of Monkey Bar since 2011 and appreciates that he can just show up and have someone tell him what to do. Weight loss was not his primary goal, but in addition to adding muscle, strength and endurance, he's shed 15 pounds. "I am there so I can eat what I want. It allows me to live a lifestyle I enjoy," Ceci says.

CrossFit is a global movement with affiliate gyms popping up on just about every corner of Milwaukee. There are more than 10 studios in a 20-mile radius alone. The short, high-intensity strength and conditioning routines, which can run anywhere from five to 40 minutes, use Olympic lifts – clean, press and jerk – and basics like sprints, pull-ups and squats. CrossFit is the principal training program for many police academies, military special operations units and champion martial artists. But don't be intimidated. The scalable program breaks down complex movements and attracts professional athletes as well as soccer moms.

"It has become so popular because people are getting great results, and they feel at home in a supportive atmosphere," says Corey Paszkiewicz, owner and head trainer of **CROSSFIT OAK CREEK** (440 W. Rawson Ave.).



Students at REACHING TREETOPS YOGA work out about a net.



The instructors at MONKEY BAR act quickly to make sure you know the ropes.

Even the more traditional, low-intensity classes like barre or yoga now have amped-up options. For example, **BARRE BEE FIT** (155 N. Water St.) is a barre class on steroids. Based on principals of ballet, the workout is engineered for the female body, though men are seen in class from time to time. “They are the first to pick up the weights or complain!” says owner and instructor Betsy King. Isolating and fatiguing each muscle group is a great way to tone, and the Barre Bee Fit Program, which was developed in Chicago, adds a cardiovascular kick. Never before has a set of dumbbells and a thin piece of green rubber appeared to be so daunting.

HOT YOGA MILWAUKEE (2084 N. Commerce St.; 17800 W. Greenfield Rd., Brookfield) was the first to introduce the concept of practicing yoga in a heated room to Milwaukee. With the thermostat cranked to 105 degrees and the room registering 45 percent humidity, instructors lead scantily clad yogis through two sets of 16 poses in a Bikram-style class or, at 95 degrees, a more fluid vinyasa class. Explains owner Bron Gacki: “The three main benefits in the heat are the detoxification through sweat, the flexibility it gives muscles and that it acts as a catalyst for restoration.”

REACHING TREETOPS YOGA (S31 W24757 Sunset Dr. and 122 N. Grandview Blvd., Waukesha) opened in 2007 and was the first studio in Wisconsin to offer aerial yoga. The acrobatic workout employs a hammock suspended a few feet off the ground that

assists with alignment and spinal decompression. Aerial yoga facilitates the unwinding of fascia (dense connective tissue) throughout your body while you build core strength.

“It’s like having a deep-tissue massage,” says Alyssa Konda, owner of Reaching Treetops. “And although it might be hard at first for some people to let go, inversions are great for blood flow, energy, clarity and awareness.” If you ever dreamed of performing with Cirque du Soleil, this is the workout for you.

DRENCH FITNESS (763 N. Plankinton Ave.) is a self-proclaimed boutique gym with an emphasis on efficiency and intensity. It’s the gym for those who measure effort in buckets of sweat. Drench offers classes with cute names like “Hit and Run” and “Morning Meltdown.” But there’s nothing cute about the way you look when you’re done with a class. It’s called Drench for a reason.

TRI WISCONSIN started in 1994 as an elite triathlon team, but has evolved in a bunch of endurance junkies who want to foster and nurture the sport. Its 400 members compete in anywhere from one to 30 triathlons throughout the year around the state. Many of the members are even Ironman competitors. Greg Renden, an Ironman and ultra-marathoner, is always looking for the next challenge that he finds intimidating. For him, working out and training is his stress release, and racing has become a projection of his identity. “It becomes a lifestyle,” Renden says. “You shift your priorities to be able to attain that next goal.” ■