

24 Hours in Toledo

BALLY TOTAL FITNESS [9 TO 10 A.M.]

No slackers on a Saturday morning at the gym

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This is the 10th in The Blade's series of 24 weekly stories that will chronicle people and places in Toledo, hour by hour. Today we are at the Cherry Street Mission.

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Walk into Bally Total Fitness on a Saturday morning and there are a few signs that you're in a serious gym.

First, there's the glass case full of supplements called things like "Amino Fuel 1000" and "Hot-Rox Fat-Loss Phenomenon."

Around the corner, the swimming pool has lanes labeled "laps" and "loafers."

Then, in case you're still not sure, there's a woman running by with a T-shirt that says: "I didn't claw my way to the top of the food chain ... to eat vegetables."

At a time when most people are sleeping in or enjoying a cup of coffee as they sit around in their jammies, this place is bustling with sweat and energy.

Treadmills are humming.

Free weights are clanging.

And Tim Nijakowski's muscles are bulging.

The 55-year-old man with a graying pony tail grunts as he does a few reps on the seated row machine, pulling 228 pounds towards him with his thick arms. Mr. Nijakowski, who runs a motorcycle shop in Swanton with his sons, has a sleeveless Harley-Davidson shirt and a tongue that wriggles out of his mouth as he exercises.

"You're up Ricky," he says as he steps away from the machine.

MULTIMEDIA

[See and hear more at Bally Total Fitness between 9 and 10 a.m.](#)

Mr. Nijakowski is here with his wife, Linda - whose shorts show off a tattoo running up the length of her right leg - and son, Richard, whose cut-off sleeves show off his own skin art. They're serious about their workout, moving businesslike from one machine to another.

"The number one goal is to stay in shape," Richard said.

But they could do that at home. They come together to the gym on Airport Highway as an escape.

"It gets your mind off the hustle and bustle of work," Richard explained. "We both work so much that this is just a way to get out. You forget all about it once you're working out."

Nearby, sounds of exertion are punctuated by breaks filled with talk of last night's basketball game and friendly chit-chat. It's Andrew Freeman, 57, and his gym buddy, Scott Drafts, 49.

They talk about it all: sports, sex, wives, politics, everything. The two - a psychotherapist and a truck driver, respectively - met at the gym years ago and formed a friendship. You know how it happens: the same guys come in at the same time, one guy asks for a spot while he's lifting, they get to talking and see what they have in common.



A patron works out at Bally Total Fitness on a Saturday morning. (BLADE PHOTOS/ALLAN DETRICH)

"This is our bar during the day," said Mr. Drafts, of Maumee. "A lot of people go out to have drinks; we come over here to work out."

"Instead of drinking beer, I do cardio now," he said.

It's like happy hour here and everyone's welcome. There's a mix of muscle men and lanky athletes working the weights. Women stretch in the yoga and aqua aerobics classes.

Upstairs, the crowd is skewed a little older right now. That's where 73-year-old Bob Huddleston is working out. The former high school wrestler, who has had a hip replaced and a paralytic stroke, is here every other day.

"If you don't stay in shape, you're in trouble," the Maumee man said. "If I take three, four days off, I just don't feel good."

Over by the treadmills and elliptical machines, movement is less deliberate, more frenetic. There are TVs to watch and everyone seems to have an MP3 player with Peter Gabriel or Bad Company.

Doug Kolacki, 41, is one of them.

At 295 pounds, he's a big guy, but he's lost more than 100 pounds in the last three years. Part of that is thanks to surgery, a procedure called laparoscopic gastric banding that controls the amount of food he can take in. Mostly, though, the South Toledo man credits an exercise regimen that he follows with an almost religious fervor five or six times a week.

Today, as 10 a.m. approaches, he's moving comfortably on a treadmill in a headband and Detroit Red Wings shirt. It wasn't always this easy for him.

"When I first started [coming to the gym], I was very self-conscious," he said. "I didn't know anybody. There's mirrors. Everybody's looking at you."

Now, well, his work speaks for itself.

"I enjoy looking at my legs," he said. "You see yourself in the mirror nowadays and you're proud of yourself, that you've done so well."

Everyone has their own little goals here. Mr. Kolacki wants to lose another 60 pounds. Across the room, Sheila Sikora, 31, of Springfield Township, is training for a half marathon.

She exercises here regularly anyway - stretching, running, even taking kickboxing classes - though at times she saves her weightlifting for Lifestyles for Ladies Only, preferring to do that around women.

"I feel like I'm in the way with the guys," she said.

Coming here is a motivation for her. It's easier to slack when you're home by yourself, she said.

But there's another reason she's here.

"Right now, I train inside 'cause it's too cold."

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Sheila Sikora trains for a half-marathon on a treadmill at the gym.