

Get fit at a nearby senior center



RUNNING BUDDY
 ALISSA MEJIA

Joining one of the hottest fitness centers in town does not require any initiation fee or monthly payment. One simply needs to

have reached the age of 55.

Every weekday, Corpus Christi's Zavala Senior Center offers anywhere from four to six group fitness classes and a nutritious lunch. A main room has equipment for use anytime the center is open, including treadmills, stationary bicycles, elliptical machines, dumbbells and a ping pong table. Everything is free. With so many offerings, seniors often take advantage of more than one per day.

"I'm in awe of their energy level," said Michelle Martinez, the center's fitness director. "Some of them go to Zumba, then they come to my class, then they walk on the treadmill."

The renovation of the center and its offerings is thanks to a partnership and donation from WellMed Charitable Foundation. Since the center's grand re-opening in March that began a new focus on fitness, attendance has more than doubled.

"We usually have between 60 and 70 people who attend on a daily basis," said Tanya Lara, the center supervisor.

Classes include strength, balance, chair volleyball, dance, tai chi and yoga. All offer modifications that allow participants to tailor the activity to their abilities. Still, the challenge is real.

"They don't treat us like little old ladies," said Irna Valdez, who started exercising in part to stay strong for her husband, for whom she is caregiver. "I

feel my legs in the shower and I find muscles where I didn't have any before."

New participants receive a fitness assessment. The center also offers health screenings in addition to social activities like bingo, embroidery and jewelry making. However, fitness remains the major draw.

"I've made a lot of friends," said Maria Luisa Valdez, who has lost 18 pounds since she started chair volleyball and a strength training class called Easy up, Easy down. "I'd never met them before in my life, but I'm not from here and it helps. A lot of people just sit at home."

Most people who take morning classes stick around for the free lunch, prepared under the guidance of **See MEJIA, Page 2B**

a nutritionist, plus conversation with new and old friends.

"It's like we're a big family here," said Alicia Canales, who said the activities keep her mind active along with her body. "We're family more than friends."

Alissa Mejia's column focuses on running and fitness. Contact her at freestylesail@gmail.com.

UPCOMING RUNS

- » PIBC Surf n' Turf Half Marathon, 10K & 5K: 7:30 a.m. Saturday, Padre Balli Park.
- » Yorktown Christian Academy 10K & 5K: 8 a.m. Feb. 11, 5025 Yorktown Blvd.
- » Puppy Love 5K: 8 a.m. Feb. 11, Cole Park.

Details and registration available via www.corpusroadrunners.com.

IF YOU GO

What: Zavala Senior Center
When: Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m.
Where: 510 Osage St.
Cost: Free.

Information: Must be at least 55 years old. For more information and the schedule, contact 361-826-3099 or visit <https://www.wellmedcharitablefoundation.org/senior-centers/zavala-senior-center/>.

