

HEALTHY LIVING

One woman's love of fitness inspires others to join in

By SARAH HULL

Wayne's own answer to the nation's energy crisis is at "MLS Fitness," where Marilu Sutter, owner and director, simply can't be stopped. The powerhouse woman with a megawatt smile and the strength of steel often teaches three and four cardio and strength classes in a day and works seven days a week. Her goal is to help women from 8 to 80 get into the best shape of their lives.

Sutter's studio is filled with the tools of her trade — brightly colored balls, buckets of arm bands, steps, body bars, and a stereo system that brings such upbeat music that many participants sing along. Her fitness classes provide a fun, creative grown-up "classroom" for women to experience a challenging workout.

Sutter was a math major in college who taught French at both the high school and college level prior to having children. The wife of Fran Sutter, a busy cardiothoracic surgeon at Lankenau Hospital, Marilu Sutter got started on improving her own cardiovascular fitness by listening to Jane Fonda tapes as a young mother of four small children. In those days, realizing there was little time to even get out for a run, she came up with the idea of setting the kids up with a movie on their one fam-

ily TV set and then working out in her bedroom. She used the kids' Fischer Price tape recorder to record Jane Fonda's voice from the videos and memorize the workout routine.

"In the midst of my hectic, crazy life, it was fun to imagine I was Janel!" says Sutter with a laugh. A few months later, while taking an aerobics class at Main Line Fitness, she was asked to train as an instructor. No one believed her when she shared that her only "teacher" had been listening to Jane Fonda tapes and working out in a 4-foot space in her bedroom.

Now, almost 17 years later, Sutter has left Main Line Health and Fitness to open her own studio right in the heart of Wayne. Having been through many of the same life experiences as her participants — from getting married and having children to defining her path as a fitness expert and business owner — she identifies with many of the concerns of the women who show up at her door.

"... They say if you love what you do, you literally add years to your life," says Sutter. And in looking at Marilu, it must be true. Now in her early 50s, she has the body of a 30-year-old and is a walking poster girl for why we all should do something cardiovascular for our bodies and strengthen and tone every day.

She also "feeds" everyone mentally with her refreshing common sense. "Look, ladies, the fact is you have to get used to eating one larger meal and two smaller meals a day, and exercising more," she says.

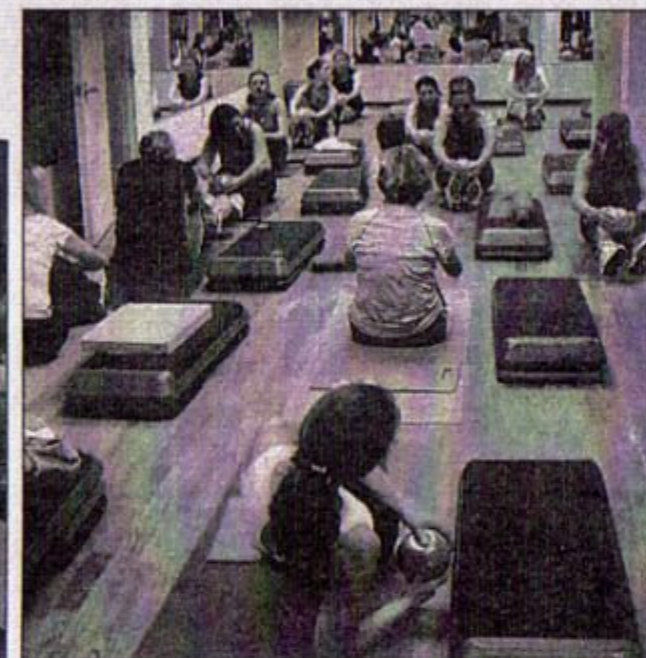
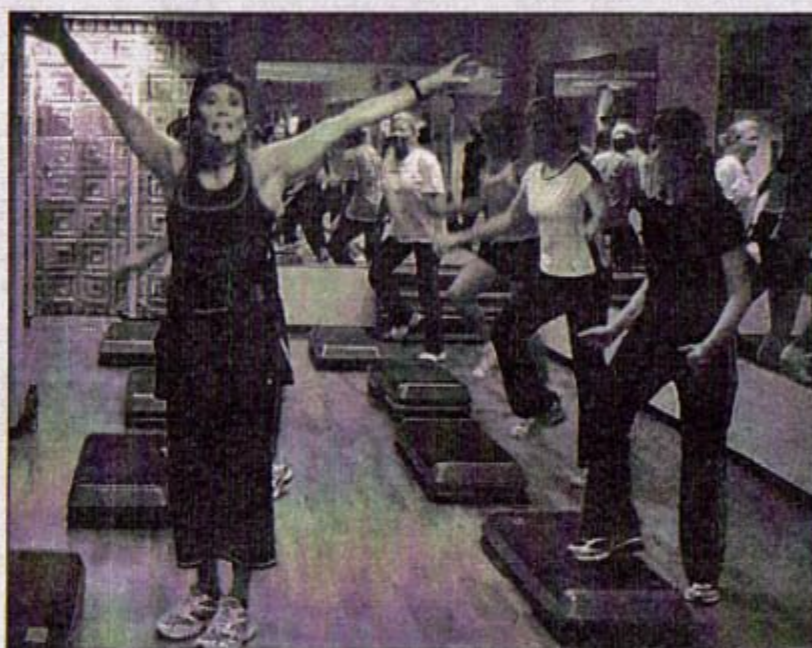
"The only carbs you're allowed are red wine and dark chocolate," she adds with a laugh.

One woman in her cardio boot camp quipped, "That's what got me here in the first place!"

Yet even with all of her warm-hearted humor, the truth hits home. As she often reminds her crew, in fitness, the math equation always equals "no work, no reward."

Courtney Fein is so inspired by the workouts that she drives from Center City each Saturday morning for the 9 a.m. class. "I was out 'til 3 a.m. last night and just didn't want to miss it! I can always go home and go back to sleep," says Fein.

Wanee Stuper drives from Gladwyne for classes and says she gets a better workout than when she had a personal trainer come to her home. She also was in a cycle of cooking big dinners for her three sons at 6 p.m. and then not



SARAH HULL PHOTOS

Marilu Sutter (standing, left) finds dozens of ways to keep her clients fit and coming back for more.

finding time for a workout for herself. "I needed to find something worthwhile, and I really enjoy moving around. Marilu's times for her classes are good, and her personality makes the workouts a lot of fun."

Karen Laskaris, a dedicated MLS attendee from Bryn Mawr, has followed Marilu from Main Line Fitness to Avalon, N.J. and back to Wayne. "When you find a really great instructor, you follow them," says Laskaris. "It's worth it."

True to the mark of all great artists, Sutter is constantly experimenting with new ideas, and is often seen leading groups with

pages of notes in her hand. She still cares after 17 years of teaching to keep people challenged and on their toes. Yet each person is encouraged to go at their own pace.

She even offers child care every morning, complete with various videos and TV for the kids, just as she did for her own children many years ago.

So, as her husband works to diagnose and repair malfunctioning hearts down at Lankenau, Marilu Sutter personally "compounds" and delivers heart healthy workouts built on a foundation of fitness knowledge, energized by uplifting, funky music

and mega doses of warmth and humor. There is nothing generic about her unique "prescription" for women's health.

"Let's go, kids!" the command rings out to the adults (no matter what the age) as the high energy music begins and Marilu, in her headband and one of her many pairs of sneakers, taps the riser in front of her. People know that regardless of the day they've had or the traffic they've fought to get there, for an hour they will have a "kick butt" tough workout and a lot of fun.

For more information, visit www.mlsfitness.com or phone 610-688-4780.