

Fitness gym gets 'Sisters in Shape'

By Stephanie Guerilus
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Melanie A. Marchand walked away from corporate America to become a champion for healthy living. The entrepreneur now has a café and gym to show for her efforts.

"I have a passion for fitness and I have a passion for my community. And I noticed that heart disease was really hurting us — killing us in large numbers," Marchand said.

"I didn't feel like people were talking about it enough and addressing it enough. So, I decided that something needed to be done to help turn around this horrible situation."

Marchand lent herself to the cause by opening Sisters In Shape Fitness. The gym focuses on a holistic approach featuring exercise and good nutrition. A variety of classes ranging from yoga, spinning, African dance

and pilates is offered at SIS. She presides over eight regimens.

The fitness buff uses her talents at a rehabilitation center where she assists children and adults. She also volunteers at an after school program for young girls twice a week. In addition, Marchand is a frequent presenter on the lecture circuits, touting the responsibility people have towards their physical, mental and spiritual health.

"If we don't take care of ourselves now in a preventative way, it will hurt us later," Marchand warned.

"If you have a heart, if you have bones, if you want to be strong and execute your daily activities with ease, if you want to feel good — you need to work out."

Donna Hampton is one of Marchand's clients and has been a loyal member since SIS's inception in 2005. She reported dropping three dress sizes since

then and cited the experience as rewarding.

"I talk to people all the time about coming into the gym and you know, begin to value yourself as a person." Hampton said. "People always say, 'Well, how much does it cost?'"

"Do you value yourself enough to put a price on that? We do frivolous things; buy clothes and spend the type of money on membership," she continued. "If you value yourself, cost is not an issue."

The base fee for membership is \$50 a month. However, specials are always being advertised. Marchand hopes that these lures will convince people not to be tempted by what she perceived as the glamorization of poor eating. Marchand admits that she spent the better half of her life indulging in these habits. The New Orleans native's father owned a fast food restaurant, Soul Burger,

which had a variety of fried delicacies.

"We would make hamburgers and French fries and malts; roast beef sandwiches and I ate it all and I enjoyed it. All of it. So, I know how good the unhealthy food tastes from being in New Orleans and eating all of it," she said.

However, she changed her taste buds. Now in her 40's, Marchand says she has an abundance of energy and doesn't get sick. She created her gym to help others get into similar shape and warned against taking short cuts as it could influence the distribution of fat and muscle mass.

Although Marchand promotes healthy dietary habits, she does not rule out the occasional treat. Furthermore, her café, the Bayou, offers an alternative to the greasy foods many people prefer. The menu consists of wraps, soups and smoothies.



Melanie A. Marchand