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## Owner: Kids finding their niche at Gymja Warrior

By Jeff Shmase

**D**ANVERS – Disney World has come to Route 114.

Well, not really, but for kids who are fans of the popular NBC show “America Ninja Warrior,” the next best thing may just be located at Danvers Indoor Sports. Gymja Warrior, which opened a year ago at the

sprawling complex, has attracted more than 13,000 kids since its opening about a year ago. The space – which formerly housed a basketball court – is designed to replicate many of the obstacles and challenges seen on the television show.

The facility features ropes, a trampoline, climbing structures, Monkey Bars and, wait for it, the Warped Walls. There are three curved walls that require

participants to run up a curved wall to the top, without the benefit of holding onto anything. There are three such walls at Gymja Warrior; the tallest one being 15 and a half feet – more than 18 inches higher than the one featured on the show.

Behind one of the walls is a Gymja Warrior motto/mission statement that all youngsters are required to read. The phrases remind users to stay positive,



Photo by Jeff Shmase

Gymja Warrior owner Shahab Afsharian, with his son, Bruno, standing next to the 15 and a half foot high wall at his business.

show respect, be responsible, and set goals, said owner

Shahab Afsharian, a Mexico native, entrepreneur and father of three young boys who watch the show and have boundless energy.

The catchy name recently was trademarked, and Afsharian proudly says his business is inspired by the Ninja Warrior.

Gymja specializes in classes and birthday parties. Classes are 90 minutes long, with certified teachers working with groups of no more than 12. Open gym times are also available for as short as a half hour, according to the gym’s website, gymjawarrior.com.

“The kids are having fun, and are getting a workout at the same time,” Afsharian said. “It’s working.”

Afsharian said some of the drills are designed to make participants faster, which helps them in sports such as hockey, lacrosse and soccer.

The classes are designed to be enjoyable, but also to challenge participants to do something they thought they were not capable of. Afsharian said the exercises build upper body strength, agility and endurance,

adding that one of kids who excels at the gym is 98 percent blind.

Fans of the show may remember a contestant named Vince Klapper, who appeared last August in the Military Finals. Klapper is an ex-Marine and the “master sensei” or head coach at Gymja Warrior. He refers to himself as the Ninjarine.

Kevin Beaky, who works for the Boston Celtics on its dunk/dance team, is also a sensei. The Celtics were kind enough to donate a logoed mat to Gymja Warrior.

Like any type of gym, participants are required to sign a waiver of liability. The gym is fully insured, said Afsharian, otherwise it would not have been allowed to open.

“You can’t imagine how many kids have found their niche here,” Afsharian said. “Most of the kids have never done any of this before, so we have to make it fun they can come back and enjoy it. We have what ever kid wants; they like to climb, swing on ropes, run around and jump and tumble.”

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