



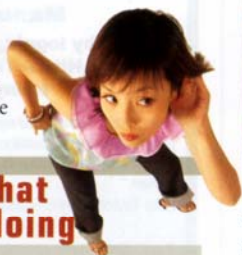
## putting the “viva” back in vegas

J & D Fitness saw a community in need of fitness inspiration and created a 5K event.

After September 11, 2001, the New York area just didn't appeal as much to Doug Sheppard and Judy Paris. The husband-and-wife personal training team called J & D Fitness was successful, yes, but the pair sensed that there were more elements to explore. They wanted to make a difference. So they decided to step outside of the comfortable Long Island bubble they had created for themselves and move to Las Vegas.

Why Vegas?

“While researching new growing communities, we



### tell us what you are doing

Are your clients obese, disabled or just starting to exercise after years of sedentary living? We want to hear how you are motivating, challenging and retaining clients on a long-term basis. In 200 words or less, detail the specifics of your program and client(s), along with your name and contact information. If your success story is compelling and unique, we may use it in a future issue or on the Inspire the World to Fitness® section of the website.

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discovered that Las Vegas had been listed in *Worth* magazine as the fastest-growing city three years in a row,” Sheppard says. “With growing cities, services like personal training are always a commodity.”

### The Disappearing Neighbors

Once Sheppard and Paris arrived in their new home, they witnessed a strange phenomenon. “People in our neighborhood would pull into their driveways, into their garages, and never come out,” Sheppard says. “We were astonished to find that some people never came to their front doors, let alone interacted with neighbors. We wanted to create a community event that would attract people to meet each other. And as fitness trainers this would give us the opportunity to meet people.”

During their first 3 months in Las Vegas, they joined the Chamber of Commerce and familiarized themselves with local government officials. Eager to build a strong foundation for J & D Fitness, they bought advertising space in a magazine as part of their marketing strategy. When they received no response, they decided to invest their money directly in people. This was when the idea for J & D Fitness Group Pump N' 5K Run started to take shape. “We had never done anything like this before,” says Sheppard. “To be honest, we had competed in only one 5K race.”

They decided to put their own spin on the 5K and add a push-up component. This was how it would work: Prior to the event, people would do as many push-ups as they could in 30 seconds, receiving a 5-second deduction for each one. They

## tips for planning a 5K in your community

After reading about the success that J & D Fitness has enjoyed with its 5K event, you may be interested in launching one of your own. Before you do, consider these words of wisdom from Doug Sheppard, the "D" in J & D Fitness:

**Be Different.** "There are so many races today," Sheppard says. "Make yours different from the rest. We gave runners the opportunity to do push-ups prior to the race and then receive a time deduction. People loved the unique approach—plus, it gave people who weren't the best runners something else they could excel in."

**Get Local Officials Involved.** "Politicians traditionally look for neighborhood events to get out and meet their constituents. Our councilman even helped us raise sponsorship money."

**Give Back.** "Not everything you do as a trainer has to be focused on getting clients. It's great to walk around town and see someone wearing a T-shirt from our event. It's even better to receive an e-mail from someone who came out and had a great time. Our biggest thrill is when people call and ask for the date of next year's event so they can mark it on their calendars."



Approximately 300 people took the J & D Fitness Group Pump N' 5K Run challenge in 2005.

would then multiply the number of push-ups by a coefficient that took age and gender into account. "Our goal was to get people active, not create another competitive race," Sheppard says.

The first event, in 2004, attracted 93 entries. In 2005, that number almost tripled. A local councilman served as master of ceremonies, and certified personal trainers answered health and fitness questions. The city sanctioned the event as part of the Las Vegas Centennial celebration. A fitness expo added value to the race. Participants enjoyed learning about health-related topics from local gym chains, exercise equipment distributors, a chiropractor, a massage therapist and a health-conscious gourmet-cooking consultant.

### A Priceless Return

Since the J & D Fitness Group Pump N' 5K Run was marketed to active families, Sheppard and Paris decided to raise money for a charity that helped children and families in need. In 2005, the couple presented \$2,500 to Candlelighters® Childhood Cancer Foundation, an organization that provides "support, education and advocacy for children and adolescents with cancer, survivors of childhood/adolescent cancer, their families and the professionals who care for them." The duo was awarded a grant through the city, and the mayor issued an official proclamation lauding their efforts.

While it is not easy to put an event like this together (in addition to running a busy personal training busi-



Carlos Ramirez, who is a stroke survivor, crosses the finish line.

ness), Sheppard says the rewards are many. "I observed a father and his 7-year-old son run while holding hands, and saw parents jogging with baby strollers. I will never forget the 'thumbs up' sign from the stroke and diabetes survivor as he crossed the finish line."

Paris shares her favorite moment: "During registration [last year] I met a woman who had heard of the event but said she wasn't fit enough to complete the challenge. She marked the date on her calendar for the following year, hired a trainer, worked on her upper-body strength, and began to walk and run on a treadmill. This year, she placed second in her category!" ■

Joy Keller is a senior editor of IDEA Fitness Journal.

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