



Mothers Make 'Strides' with Unique Exercise Program

By Marna Bunker
Sun Contributor

New mothers can easily attribute weight gain to their pregnancies. But, how many mothers can say they use their babies for weight loss and total fitness? Mothers in the Valencia area are doing just that. The local Stroller Strides group was organized to help moms make new strides in fitness, motherhood, and life.

Shelly Jefferis organized the group that meets in the Central Valley Park. The workouts are one hour consisting of a 50-minute walk followed by 10 minutes of abs and/or stretching.

"Each class consists of a warm up, a power walk and stations where we do a variety of body toning exercises," Jefferis explained. "We use exercise tubing (which we provide), the stroller and the outdoor environment to create our gym. If a baby is fussy, we will do exercises to calm the baby."

The core values of the exercise program focus around offering support and education for moms, helping to reach optimal health and well being, and teaching children to emulate their moms and make fitness a part of their lives.

"Finding the time to exercise postpartum is difficult. Baby schedules don't always cooperate. Mothers have guilt about leaving kids in daycare while they go to workout. Our program provides the mothers exercise, engages the kids, and provides an overall sense of community," said Jefferis, a certified group exercise instructor with a masters degree in kinesiology.

Stroller Strides was founded in 1999 by Lisa Druxman, a San Diego resident. Druxman, who had worked in the fitness industry since 1990, only realized the need for specialty mom fitness after she had her own children. She wanted to blend her passion for fitness with motherhood. When her son was born, she went outside with her stroller because she didn't have time to go to the gym. She created a series of exercises to get back in shape. Before she knew it, Lisa had developed the Stroller Stride workout.

In the first year, 12 Stroller Strides locations formed in San Diego County with more

than 1,000 moms.

"I was interested in starting up Stroller Strides in the Santa Clarita Valley after hearing about its success in San Diego. I have two children of my own and I knew the growth in the area could support the program," Jefferis stated.

On May 16, 2003, Stroller Strides in Valencia held its first classes. Today, the class attendance ranges from 10-20 mothers, and newborns through pre-teens accompany. Jefferis said the popularity of the Central Valley Park workout has allowed for expansion. She is currently looking for trainers and franchisees.

One of the biggest fans and success stories of the Valencia Stroller Strides group is Kiersten Barron, the 35 year-old mother of one-year old Kyler. Barron was on bed rest during her pregnancy and gained 65 pounds. After Kyler was born, she rarely left the house.

"Stroller Strides took my life in a new direction and snapped me out of my postpartum depression. Not only have I lost weight since joining last June, I am below my pre-pregnancy weight and I have never been so toned and fit. People notice and it feels great," Barron said.

In addition to exercise, Stroller Strides provides a sense of community. "We share advice, organize playdates, and even get our husbands and family to join us on Saturday in the park. She is so happy with the group that she and Kyler continue to recruit new members.

Liana Kitchener, 42, has 10- and 12-year old sons. When her daughter, Selena, was born, Kitchener decided to retire and be a stay at home mom. She quickly realized she had no time to work out and didn't want spend money on a gym membership and babysitting. Her solution was Stroller Strides.

"I wanted to do something good for myself and Selena and not feel guilty," Kitchener stated. "This goes way beyond a workout. This is knowledge exchange. This is support and friendship."

In addition to losing weight, Kitchener has lowered her cholesterol count. She credits it all to the Stroller Strides community and is interested in becoming a trainer as a result of the experience.

Amy Luoma, 31, left her career as an attorney to raise her daughter, Tatum. "Exercise



Tatum Luoma looks cool in purple shades.

has always been a part of my life and I've always been involved in sports. I was new to the area and I wanted to meet other moms."

Luoma and 21 month-old Tatum got even more.

"This group clicks with each other despite the differences in age and family size. I help coordinate playgroups and moms' night out. The people are so down to earth and accepting," she said.

It is hard to understand Stroller Strides until you experience it. The strength training and brisk walking provide an overall workout that is felt the next day. The mothers emphasized the stereotype image is not slow, chatty strolling pushing. They work hard and keep the kids engaged with songs and exercise.

"My husband was so proud of the progress I made with Stroller Strides, he came out one Saturday to experience it. Most of all, he got to meet my new network of moms. We are truly a team," Barron concluded.

Stroller Strides meets at the Central Valley Park entrance near Carrizo Drive and Valencia Valley Elementary School at the picnic tables. Sessions are held at 8:30 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and 4 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday. On Saturday, families are invited to attend at 9:30 a.m. The first class is free and subsequent classes are \$10, or \$8 if a block of classes is purchased. For more information about Stroller Strides, call Shelly Jefferis at 661-259-5163 or visit www.strollerstrides.com.