

By JESSICA FENDER FOR THE NEWS

By the time the sun rises, women participating in the Rancho-based Adventure Boot camp are ready to hit the showers.

They've stretched, strained and sweated since 5:30 a.m., and can count themselves 1,000 calories lighter of everyone else who decided to sleep in.



PUMPING WEIGHTS: Donna McIntyre, center, participates in a fitness boot camp.

"We provide a safe and effective environment where women can reach their goals for nutrition, fitness and self esteem," said camp founder John Spencer Ellis. "We do a lot of lifestyle enhancements." There's also a 9 a.m. course. The largest private boot camp in Orange County attracts about 550 women a year - many repeat customers - who flock to the facility for a unique combination of calisthenics, cardio, and community. The month-long training sessions are in the spirit of military boot camps with added extras like safety and nutrition training and instructors who won't call a trainee "maggot".

Cindy Allen, 48, of Trabuco Canyon, started at Adventure Boot Camp about a year ago. She'd been working out on the treadmill and bike machines at a local gym.

"I was really inconsistent. I'd go for four months every morning; then I wouldn't go for a month," she said. "But I thought I was doing pretty good until I went to boot camp and realized I was kind of a slug."

Knowing that she had to show up for workouts each morning kept her motivated, she said.



WORK OUT: Wanda White, left, does crunches Tuesday. Florica Hafiz, right, participates.

She ended each day sore, but liked it so much she brought two of her daughters along to try the camp, too.

So far she's been through six month-long sessions.

At her lowest weight, she had lost 20 pounds, and when she recently got her heart checked out, "they told me I was a stud."

The Web site states that women who complete the Adventure Boot Camp program will lose 3 to 5 percent body fat and between 5 and 12 pounds, but Ellis said the sessions provide more than that.

"We want to have something where women can feel comfortable and not feel weird if they don't have any make-up on or just rolled out of bed,"

said Ellis, a certified instructor of Pilates, yoga, water fitness and 13 other disciplines.

"If you don't enjoy the process, your brain will come up with enough reasons not to do it."

Instructors keep it fun by constantly changing the activities for the daily, hour-long workouts.

One day might include a run around Lago Rancho Santa Margarita, an obstacle course and some push-ups.

The next could include Pilates, specialized yoga and strength.

Most of the exercising is done outdoors where "the fresh air is addictive," according to instructor Christina Knapp.

"(People enjoy) the open, free feeling of working out outdoors," she said. "Typically people work 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in an office. They're confined all day."

Everyone is welcome and the boot camp attracts women of all ages, occupations and fitness levels, Knapp said.

Wanda White, 60 of Mission Viejo, is on her third session.

She started in March when she wanted to jumpstart her fitness routine. She worked out regularly, but had been slacking off for a while.

The boot camp did the trick. "I was going to a health club and using the treadmill and elliptical machines," White said. "I enjoyed the fact that this is outside and in a group. It seems to motivate me more."

Month-long sessions at Adventure Boot Camp cost \$299. Running camps, yoga camps and others are also available. Log on to www.ocbootcamp.com for more information.