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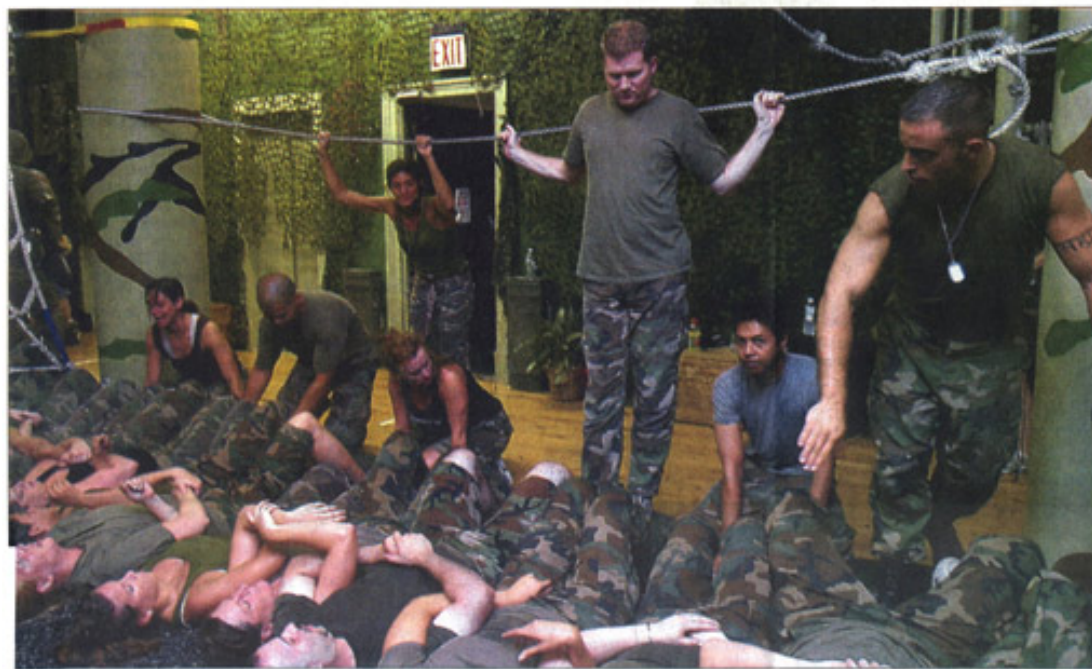
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After a grueling hour-long workout at Pure Power Boot Camp in Manhattan, recruits lock arms to do group sit-ups as a final drill.

STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE/NICHOLAS REVOLD

Pure Power Boot Camp owner Lauren Brenner uses canteens filled with water instead of weights for arm toning exercises. "Free water is heavier than just solid pounds," she says.

REPORTING FOR BOOT CAMP

The quest for fitness and personal empowerment fostered by teamwork lures 'recruits' to a Manhattan obstacle course



Eltingville resident Michael Puleo, second from front, falls in line for warm-up exercises.

By DIANE O'DONNELL / STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

The elevator door opens onto the second-floor Flat Iron district loft, a converted space dressed in hues of brown, green and khaki and camouflage netting.

Men and women in trendy 9-to-5 office wear disembark. Without hesitation, they drop to the floor and do five push-ups. The "platoon" has arrived at Pure Power Boot Camp, a 6,500-square-foot indoor obstacle course in Manhattan modeled after the U.S. Army's real deal at Fort Knox, Ky.

Within minutes the recruits — a Web researcher, visual merchandiser, administrative assistant, and the like — have donned fatigues. All vestiges of corporate facade are ban-

ished for the next hour. "Whatever goes on during the day doesn't mean anything. You're in here," says boot camp owner Lauren Brenner, 32, who at a buff 5-foot-6 1/2 cuts a formidable presence. "Whatever you do for a living means nothing. Whatever money you make means nothing. You're part of a platoon."

And she's serious. Arrive late, or fall behind in what is physically expected of you — based on an individual fitness

Fall in

Recruits looking for a fitness fix can report to Pure Power Boot Camp to tackle a 6,500-square-foot obstacle course modeled after the one at Fort Knox, Ky.

Where
38 W. 21st Street, second floor
Manhattan

The cost
\$929 for a six-week tour of duty. Recruits meet four times a week for hour-long workouts.

For more information
Call (212) 414-1886 or log on to www.purepowerbootcamp.com

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Reporting for boot camp

exam — and the whole unit pays in extra sit-ups, jumping jacks or some other form of calisthenics.

Therein lies the crux of the boot camp's grueling yet appealing charm: A sense of personal empowerment fostered by teamwork.

"I really believe after 9/11 people wanted to become more spiritually, more physically connected," says Brenner, a former Wall Street trader who started Pure Power in January 2004.

EMERGING TREND

According to the American Council on Exercise (ACE), which certifies exercise professionals and acts as an unofficial consumer advocate, Brenner's program is part of an emerging trend in a fitness industry looking to attract and motivate clients.

"It does provide people a novel more engaging exercise experience," said Cedric Bryant Ph.D., chief exercise physiologist of the San Diego, Calif.-based ACE. "One of the challenges that we face is to keep the exerciser engaged and interested in being physically active."

Ten minutes into their warm-up, red-faced and panting Pure Power recruits are divided into groups of five or six led by former Marine sergeants.

"This is as close as you're going to get to the real thing without enlisting," barks Sgt. C.J. Raimondi, 25, as he leads his group to their first training station.

The next 50 minutes push the recruits beyond what they presumed were their limits.

Eltingville resident Michael Puleo, a home accessories visual merchandiser, must clear a set of eight wooden hurdles 3 1/2 feet high before complet-

ing a second circuit crouching under them, arms clasped behind his head.

"I came in here thinking I was in decent shape," says Puleo, 27, now bathed in sweat. "After class I still shake because (Brenner) puts me through the wringer."

NO TIME FOR REST

Rest is not on the way for Puleo or his unit as they dangle their way hand-over-hand across 20 rungs of monkey bars before tackling a rock climbing wall.

"There's no point in having a manicure in this place," says Lauren Gorsky, an advertising sales coordinator, as she scales the second side of the 30-foot-long by 9-foot-high wall.

No sooner has the 22-year-old Manhattanite maneuvered the wall than she's on the ground for abdominal crunches.

With a clap of her hands Brenner sends her recruits to their feet again to run up and down six flights of stairs.

"Someone's not wearing their Arid Extra Dry and it's giving me a freakin' headache," she bellows into her microphone head set. Moments later she breaks into song "Love is in the air."

Despite grunts and groans, the recruits are hooked: Many will reup when the 24 sessions of boot camp end. Pure Power has a 98 percent recidivism rate; some clients stay as long as a year in order to attain a fitness goal.

Recruits sign on for a six-week tour, which meets four times a week at a cost of \$929. Discounts are given to repeat customers.

MORE THAN FITNESS

In addition to getting clients physically fit and



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE/NICHOLAS FEVELO

With his arms clasped behind his head, Eltingville resident Michael Puleo crouches under a set of eight 3 1/2 feet high wooden hurdles.

whittled down in weight, which is measured by drops in clothing sizes rather than a scale, Brenner says her regimen has helped some make important life changes: Everything from career switches to leaving bad relationships.

Bryant acknowledges that Pure Power and similar boot-camp-type programs can help provide a mind-body transformation.

"They can really work on many aspects of fitness," he explains, "because many of these activities also tend to have full-body type challenges. They're so associated with the military and that 'be-all-that-you-can-be' type of a mindset that I think many people derive a great degree of self-confidence and they feel much better about themselves. There's a whole psychological aspect."

In the coming months, Brenner's gearing up to launch a program aimed at getting post-pregnancy moms back into their pre-baby jeans, as well as two workout DVDs due out by late winter and plans to franchise her boot-camp nationally.

Brenner boasts if you don't see results, she'll train you for free — provided you didn't go AWOL for a session. So far, no one's challenged the claim.

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