

New exercise program makes the world your gym

EcoTrek Fitness sessions available every day in West Michigan

Staying fit is like a walk in the park—a fast walk, with different sessions of total-body workouts. Terri Baumgardner is a Rockford resident who knows our parks and outdoor places well. A certified aerobics instructor, Baumgardner heard about EcoTrek Fitness and loved the idea. EcoTrek is a concept created by a West Michigan native that uses the great outdoors

as the backdrop to a healthy, 75-minute workout. The routine is a mix of cardio, strength and stretching that takes place in parks and outdoor locations.

"This is completely different than anything else," said Baumgardner. It's very different than going to a gym and participating in a class where there is no connection with the other people. We have a lot of fun, walking and talking, and every location is different."

Baumgardner offers her EcoTrek workouts on Monday morning and Wednesday evenings. She has brought her clients to Pickerel Lake, Townsend Park, the Cannon Trail, downtown Rockford, Rogue River Park, Memorial Park in downtown Rockford and the Cannonsburg Ski Hill. "We go to eight or nine locations, each one is different and is different seasonally as well." The workouts are for any adult and even teens have participated. "You wouldn't want to bring a small child along, but anyone can do this," Baumgardner said.

People need show up only with comfortable clothing and tennis shoes. Baumgardner said newbies don't need to worry that they can't keep up. "We do some walking and then we stop and exercise for a while," she said. At a recent Wednesday night workout the group started at the Cannon Trail off Sunfish Lake Road and walked the trail to Townsend Park. In the woods the team stopped and did exercises in the trees using strength-training bands (which are provided). "You may notice that we were exercising and some of the people came along after a little bit," Baumgardner said. "We do that so the slower ones can catch up and go at their own pace. We don't leave the slow ones behind."

Cari Draft is the person who came up with the concept. She did so after attending an outdoor certification course offered for athletic trainers by Nike in Beaverton, Oregon. After the three-day session, she created a flier inviting all of her girlfriends and acquaintances to take part in an outdoor workout. Only a handful showed up, but those who did encouraged her to create a series of sessions.

The outdoor workouts take place year around, and Draft said the first winter "was a complete learning process, but a good one." EcoTrek survived to see its first birthday in May, 2007. Draft said by the fall of 2007, she hired a longtime EcoTrekker to lead a series of sessions in the Coopersville area. Later she hired another for southwest Grand Rapids. Baumgardner began offering



EVERY MUSCLE—EcoTrek's workout is designed to exercise the whole body and provide an excellent heart-healthy session.

her sessions in Rockford nearly a year ago.

"You can find an EcoTrek session every single day in the West Michigan area now," Baumgardner said. Here in Rockford the idea has garnered followers who look forward to the workouts in different locations. To celebrate her one-year anniversary with EcoTrek, Baumgardner is offering a special one day trial for only \$1. The workout will be Wednesday, September 23 at Rogue River Park in downtown Belmont at 6:15 p.m.

"You can just show up, or call me at (616) 874-0145," said Baumgardner. The program also has a website with more information at ecotrekfitness.com.

Baumgardner said she has always been health conscious, but more so as she has gotten older. "Being fit is not a number on a scale," she said. "I believe in everything in moderation. Exercise is great, it's also okay to enjoy that treat now and again." She said she believes people need to find an exercise program that they love and do it. "If that's working out in the gym, fine, that's what you should do." She said the important thing is to not allow yourself to become sedentary. "This is especially important as we age," she said. "As we get older, we lose some of our balance. We don't pick our feet up as high as when we were young, so we tend to trip more." Fighting that aging process through exercise of some sort alleviates some of these symptoms.

EcoTrek has no initiation fee. Participants can pay as they go per session, which is \$12 for a drop in session of 75 minutes. Signing up for four to seven sessions brings the price down to \$10 per and signing up for 8 to ten brings the price to \$9 each. Anything above 11 brings the price to \$8. With different trainers around West Michigan, the plan is also flexible. Buy your sessions from Baumgardner and you can use them somewhere else with a different trainer.

"Keep your brain active and keep your body active," Baumgardner said. "I had one EcoTrekker say she was very happy because when she started she was always the last one and now she keeps up with the group. It's nice to hear that feedback."

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