



West Valley VIEW

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Man, 77, celebrates 18 years at EMCC gym

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Bob Vehock is a 77-year-old superman.

Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday he wakes up with the sun, throws on his gym attire, and heads to Estrella Fitness Center for an hour-long workout.

He's been doing this for 18 years.

"Bob was one of our original members when we first opened up in 1992. He's been continuously enrolled ever since, and the only person to be as continuously enrolled that long," said Lyle Bartelt, manager of the fitness center at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale.

BOB VEHOCK, 77, has been working out at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale since its fitness center opened in 1992. The center is celebrating its re-grand opening Sept. 18, when Vehock will be honored.

Bartelt oversees the ongoings of the center, which now enrolls approximately 600 members and is about to celebrate its re-grand opening.

He describes Vehock as "part of the morning crew," a group of students and community members who show up like clockwork each day to make sure they stay physically fit.

"It's a very disciplined group who stays motivated on a consistent level. We're a smaller facility, so people tend to know each other, and they certainly get to know us. The social support is so important to maintaining healthy habits," Bartelt said.

And the social atmosphere is just one of the reasons Vehock keeps going back, the west Phoenix resident said.

"I don't think there's a person at the gym who doesn't say hi this or hi that," Vehock said. "The people that run the place really are outstanding. I don't think I've met a person there I didn't like. It's like a little mini family."

Of course, the notion of staying in shape and healthy is the other reason Vehock makes the center part of his weekly regimen.

"Ninety percent of people don't stick to an exercise routine because they expect too much too fast," Vehock said. "I always tell people, and this is a quote of mine, the absolute hardest thing about exercising is getting [to the gym]. Once you get there, it's simple."

A new lifestyle begins

Vehock began exercising at age 55 when he retired from Western Electric Co. after 34 years of service.

"I had no intention of retiring that early. But when I did, I sat back and I woke up in the morning, grabbed some coffee, read a paper and tossed a coin to figure out what I was going to do next," he said. "So, I thought, 'What the heck, I'll join a club.'"

Vehock tried two other facilities in the Maryvale area before Estrella Mountain Community College opened the doors to its fitness center.

"The fitness center was one of the original programs at Estrella Mountain. At the time there was very little other major development out here," Bartelt said. "We were the only fitness center of our size in our immediate service area. Of course over the years, lots of houses have been built and new fitness centers open, but we pretty much offer anything anyone needs to live a fit and healthy life."

That's largely true, Vehock said.

His routine begins with a few stretching exercises, followed by various workouts on a variety of machines, targeting muscles on his legs, midriff and upper body.

As a general rule of thumb, Vehock will attempt at least one set of 15 repetitions of each exercise - never exceeding 100 pounds in weight.

"I try to proportion myself to hit everything somewhat. But it depends on how I feel. I don't want to push myself too much to where I hurt myself," he said. "I do it for exercise. I'm not trying to be an Arnold Schwarzenegger."

Eating the right foods and choosing appropriate lifestyle habits, such as not smoking, also go hand in hand with regular exercise for living a healthy life, Vehock said.

"You got to control your appetite. Me and my wife don't eat junk food; we eat a lot of vegetables and fruit. We're the type of people that go out to eat maybe twice a week and that's it," he said.

"And what always gets my goat is there's a table of nursing students outside the fitness center - and half of them smoke," he added.

Vehock will be honored, along with other members of Estrella Fitness Center, during the club's re-grand opening to take place from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday.

"It makes me feel good. I think it's a nice gesture on their part," he said. "Exercise is the reason I'm still here. I get up, and I really think it kind of rejuvenates me. If I didn't exercise for the last 18 years, who knows where I'd be?"

For information on Estrella Fitness Center and its re-grand opening activities and membership rates, call 623-935-8400 or visit www.estrellamountain.edu/fitness-center.

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