Into the trenches

PHILIP WALKER, RECORD STAFF

Fitness boot camps have become a popular way to drop the pounds

By Amy Fuller, Record staff

Friday, June 27, 6:30 a.m., Victoria Park, Kitchener

Most people are still fumbling for the snooze button when Chris Walker orders his crew into action at 6:30 a.m. on a Friday.

"Twenty dive bombs!"

Six women drop to the ground, scraping their bellies across colourful yoga mats arranged in a semicircle in the park, by the kids' play area.

Legs taut, bums in the air, they swoop down and then up in an advanced version of the push-up. Walker paces a patch of grass in the middle and eyes their form. He's got a whistle, a stopwatch and a bullhorn, and in green camouflage he looks not unlike Tommy Europe of *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp* reality television show.

For a self-declared fitness maniac and drill sergeant, he's soft-spoken and easygoing. But he keeps them moving: a chart on his clipboard details drills for the lower body, upper body and abs. He adjusts the workout according to fitness levels.

As predicted by the results of a national survey of American fitness professionals in January, and helped along by *The Last 10 Pounds*, four to eight-week fitness boot camps have become a popular trend locally and elsewhere. Some women join pre-wedding or post-baby, but as many others sign up because they want a dramatic lifestyle change. The group setting helps them get going.

The women at Walker's boot camp — homemakers, graduate students, a dental hygienist and a business analyst — range in age from early 20s to 40s.

Bridget Pereira, 22, flashes an engagement ring, but she's the only bride-to-be. The others say they're here because it's something new, it's a more intense workout, and it uses natural movements rather than exercise machines.

Walker also has them keep a food journal and follow his *Common Sense Eating Guide*. And the outdoor setting beats the gym, apart from the mosquitoes. (He quips, "Bugs got lots of protein, so if you eat one it's not bad.")

The dive-bombs trigger a chorus of grunts and groans. Sweat dribbles down necks and off noses and the acrid aroma of bug spray wafts above picnic tables. Lynne MacDonald pipes up.

"You won't be able to lift your arms after this," says MacDonald, panting. The others call her Little Miss Chatterbox.

IAN WILLMS, RECORD STAFF

ABOVE: Mothers are put through the paces during a Stroller Bootcamp at Waterloo Park. The twice-weekly sessions are put on by Absolute Health and Fitness.

LEFT: Elaine Ruddock (from top) and Chris and Liz Coggins work out during a session put on by PHAT Weight Loss and Personal Training.

Walker rolls his eyes and snickers. "Oh good. Horror stories."

Chatterbox is a sassy, sinewy Waterloo mom who's been attending Walker's boot camp since April. She wears a T-shirt that features her cartoon namesake, and her ponytail bobs out the back of a white cap as they begin one-handed push-ups on the picnic tables and trees.

"You're workin' the chest," Walker says. "It's only 20 on each side. No big deal."

"Great — now for the next workout, Chris is going to get us to all come over and help him move," Chatterbox says.

Walker giggles.

"Soon you'll be able to do these on the ground and enter bodybuilding shows," he counters, with a dubious degree of sincerity.

Monday, June 30, 7 p.m., a suburban Waterloo home

Sandra Henderson of PHAT Weight Loss and Personal Training takes the personal approach a step further by bringing her boot camp to clients' homes. Henderson left her job at a gym because she felt limited by the set programming.

"I felt it was time to put my own personal stamp on training: weight loss coupled with fitness," she says.

On a warm Monday evening, she's at Chris and Liz Coggins' house in a leafy Waterloo neighbourhood. The Coggins initially hired Henderson as a personal trainer, but they like working out in a group, and more participants means a lower price. When a flood ruined the flooring in their basement office, they installed blue and green foam tiles for a home gym.

After two friends of the Coggins arrive, Henderson orders knee-ups and burpees, then some core-body exercises. Liz struggles with the bicycle move, grimacing and laughing.

"My legs are dead, right here," she says, patting her thighs. Meanwhile, Chris hefts a 45-pound Olympic bar and Nancy Jones wields hand weights.

"It's never the same stuff twice," says Jones. "It's amazing how hard you work with your own body."

Wednesday, July 2, 9:30 a.m., Waterloo Park

If anyone knows what a body can do, it's Pamela Bortmes, co-owner of Absolute Health and Fitness in Waterloo. She's mom to two boys and a girl and recently placed fourth in her division at the Ontario Physique Association's provincial figure competition. She also runs Stroller Bootcamp in Waterloo Park twice a week.

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Ready for a military-style workout?

Local boot camps offer intense workouts to help you battle flab. Remember to eat before you go and bring a yoga mat and water.

For women:
Women's Only Fitness Boot Camp, with trainer Chris Walker. Three days a week (morning or evening) for one hour in Victoria Park, Kitchener. $10 per class or $120 per month. Bring five-pound weights. Contact: 519-743-4949 or see www.fitnesstrainingformenandwomen.com.

For you:
Personalized Boot Camp, with trainer Sandra Henderson. For brides, teens, friends or family, in your home or backyard. Price varies according to the number of participants, classes and location (eight classes for five people in town is $20 per class). Contact: 519-503-9497 or see www.phatweightloss.com.

For moms:
Stroller Bootcamp, with trainer Pamela Bortmes. Monday and Wednesday, 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. in Waterloo Park. Meet in the parking lot by Lions Lagoon Splash Park. Bring your child and a stroller. $85 for a flexpass: eight classes over 12 weeks. Contact: 519-886-1568 or see www.absolutehealthandfitness.ca.

For the beach:
Booty Camp Fitness, with trainer Amanda Zettel. Tuesday and Thursday, 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. outside at Lester B. Pearson Public School, 520 Chesapeake Dr. in Waterloo. $159 for four weeks; $299 for eight weeks. Contact: 416-893-0354, ext. 720 or see www.bootycampfitness.com.

Personality disorder a possibility

Dear Ellie

Q: During 18 months dating, she cheated twice, related to her huge fear of feeling abandoned.

She was always suspicious of me.

She doesn't drink often, but always drinks to excess.

She lied, she manipulated, she yelled, and threw things.

I insisted she go to counselling as a condition of getting back together. She convinced the counsellor that I was the problem, projecting a lot of her problems onto me. It helped nothing.

I was told about Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and, from my research, think this may apply. I want her to get tested. How do I convince her she may have this disorder, and how do I ensure I maintain my sanity in the process?

A: If she's concerned about her behaviour and pattern of relationships, you could as a friend recommend she look into this. But pressing the matter, or pushing this lay diagnosis at her could backfire, causing her to suspect you of manipulation and confirming her most negative view of you.

If you care enough to not be concerned about your image, let her know that BPD, or any other personality disorder that affects mood swings, can be managed, usually through behaviour modification treatment and medication.

You can share your research, help her find a specialist, then bow out, at least while she goes through the process of coming to terms with this, herself.

ISSUES WITH HER FAMILY

Q: I've always been treated differently from my three siblings, though my parents deny this.

They'd knowingly miss important events (graduations, sports events), and yell at me more. I was always a straight-A student, never got into trouble; my siblings have partied more than me, been in trouble with the law, been unemployed, I was the first to get a part-time job at 16 — so financial support was stopped.

I'm now 27 and about to get married.

My parents tried everything to stop our dating. I understand their problems with his being of a different religion, but they've treated us both so poorly I've started speaking out. (For years, he was forced to hide in the basement when relatives came over so they wouldn't know I was dating him.)

We've been together for seven years!

I'm the only sibling who's had to go through this. I'm ready to stop talking to them all, parents and siblings, after the wedding.

Should I give up and look forward to my new life?

A: You'll be happiest in your new life if you at least try to resolve your anger and resentment.

Your parents may've seen you as more special than the others, and made higher demands; you'll not know the answer to the "why" of their attitude unless they're willing to go to family therapy with you, and that seems unlikely.

But you have the opportunity to change your outlook — by living independently with your husband, and setting boundaries you can handle for how much they're involved in your life.

You two need to set the limits — whether a weekly dinner, or less often; daily phone calls or only on weekends; responses to any questions about finances, etc.

HORRIBLE LIVING SITUATION

Q: My best friend and her boyfriend broke up; each wants the other to move out.

She's more responsible about paying the bills.

He often can't pay his share.

Almost everything in the apartment is hers.

Her ex is very angry — he says he'll make living there hell for her by having his friends over late, every night.

How should she handle this?

A: She moves out, he takes over the apartment lease, she removes her name from it, and the bills are his problem.

She should not be there, living with a hostile ex in a divided camp (see the movie *War of the Roses*, with Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner; it ends badly).

However, if they're officially common-law (depending on jurisdiction), she needs legal advice.

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