

PERSONAL BUSINESS

RETIRING

Hitting the Gym and the Trails, Looking to Extend the Golden Years

By ABBY ELLIN

VINCE AND LINDA FERRIGNO no longer eat 30 fried shrimp every Friday night. In fact, they rarely eat anything fried. Instead of drenching their salads in dressing, they dip in a fork and spear the vegetables. They mostly steer clear of bread and pasta, and limit their daily caloric intake to 1,500. They write down their fitness objectives, and they exercise together three days a week.

"It's good for our marriage, good for our health," said Ms. Ferrigno, 67, a retired wedding consultant who lives with her husband in Jacksonville, Fla.

This routine was not always so. It wasn't until Mr. Ferrigno, now 78 and the retired owner of a company that made air-conditioners, was in his early 70s that he started caring about his physical well-being. But even then he did not do much about it.

Working out was never his thing. "I played a little ball, but that was it. I'm not like Louie Ferrigno," he said, referring to Lou Ferrigno, the actor and former body builder who played the title character in the television show "The Incredible Hulk." (He's a distant cousin, Vince Ferrigno says.)

After selling his company two years ago, Mr. Ferrigno decided it was time, finally, to shed the 70 pounds that had plagued him since he began jogging 10 to 12 hours a day in the office. If he didn't lose weight, he wouldn't be able to enjoy his retirement. He might not even live many more years. "I started realizing I had to change my ways or 90 or 100 isn't going to be reached," said Mr. Ferrigno, who has high blood pressure.

To help him stay on track, he and his wife, who has lost 30 pounds, spend a week each year at Hilton Head Health, a weight-loss resort in South Carolina, which costs \$3,290 per person, per week (\$2,800 per person if two or more come together).

There they exercise three to four hours a day, eat healthy food and enjoy lectures on nutrition and general well-being. Mr. Ferrigno has gone from 250 pounds to 210, and hopes to reach 195.

Common wisdom has held that you have not adopted an exercise or fitness routine in your early years, you probably won't start a later life. But like so many misconceptions about middle and old-age, the idea is slow-

ly fading away. According to the International Health Racquet & Sportsclub Association, people 55 and older are the fastest-growing membership segment for the health club industry. In 1990, 1.9 million health club members were age 55 and above; last year, that figure hit 12 million, a 532 percent increase.

Many clubs are catering to this age group, hiring trainers with specialized certifications and offering specific low-impact classes, said Meredith Poppler, a spokeswoman for the association. An April 2015 report from Marketdata Enterprises, which tracks the diet and fitness industry, estimates that 17.2 million adults 55 and older are dieting.

The driving force is usually health. "They had a heart attack, or a friend had a heart attack," said Dr. John Whyte, an internist in Great Falls, Va., and author of

the "AARP New American Diet Lose Weight, Live Longer." "They've been told they have pre-diabetes. They finally get a 'jolt' that makes them decide they need to start working out."

Medicare will cover obesity screening and behavioral counseling, though there are some stipulations.

So many people, especially those with discretionary income, are starting their programs at fitness and health resorts, where they can exercise in a controlled environment, eat healthful food and learn about proper nutrition. Retirees often have the time and resources to drop out of the real world for a few weeks and focus on their health.

Sheree Janke, 57, of Edmonton, Alberta, is a semiretired dental hygienist who works one day a week. Seven years ago she wanted to lose the 41 pounds she had

gained after having three children in nearly four years. Her blood pressure was rising, and her doctor wanted to put her on medication. She balked. "Once you start going on those meds you don't get off of them unless you make a major lifestyle change," she said.

She did a web search for "boot camp" and found Fitness Ridge (now called Movara Fitness Resort), in Ivins, Utah. For about \$1,500 a week, she could hike six to eight miles a day, eat three healthful meals, take exercise classes and get herself back on track. She lost the weight, which she has more or less kept off, and returns to Movara annually for a tuneup.

"It was the motivation I needed to keep getting healthier in order to have a better quality of life in retirement," Ms. Janke said.

For Ms. Janke, Movara's price

exercise and diet are also about mental health, and changing their approach to aging.

For the last four years, Joe Boland, 61, who sells software in Ann Arbor, Mich., has worked with Steve Dailey, a business coach in Pahoa, Hawaii, to help him with his professional goals. Now he's focusing on his physical health. Next month, he is going to visit Mr. Dailey, who runs Base Camp Hawaii and Body Temple Boot Camp with his wife, Kleba Blackledge Dailey.

"I have not yet achieved my optimal weight goal. It's been a challenge for some years," said Mr. Boland, a former athlete who has had five knee surgeries. Although he swims two to three times a week and tries to eat what he carries around 60 extra pounds. "One of the motivations is that I want to live to be 90, and I want to keep walking and be healthy. My orthopedic surgeon says guys my size usually aren't able to walk independently in their 70s, so I need to lose some weight."

But weight loss is just part of the plan. "What he will focus on goes far beyond exercise and nutrition," said Mr. Dailey, 61, a former competitive swimmer. "Exercise and nutrition are tools for a successful life. They aren't the end goal. My focus for Joe during his time here will be about developing a mind-set and the tool of living an extraordinary and purposeful life in his second half."

John Striker, 71, a retired fisher who lives on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, hiked through Pakistan and India. He didn't want to lose "joy" in later life. "It's too easy to drift off into getting old," he said. "The muscles are just not responding. You get up in the morning and you're stiffer. You have to draw a line in the sand. I'm not going let that happen. You have to up the effort in shape."

For the last nine years he paid a visit to Mountain View British Columbia every year to be rejuvenated. \$4,500 for seven nights from five to 12 miles a day of hiking beautiful scenery, no sugar or processed food. "It's like money well spent."

"As I get older, I'm more minded of the potential of my body, what it is capable of. I really take care of it. My body may not be as good as it was at 25, but it can still be



Linda and Vince Ferrigno going through their workout routine at the Wolfson Wellness Center in Jacksonville, Fla.

ALAN RAYSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES