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## MUSCLE BOUND

by Cindi R. Maciolek | Photography by Jim K. Decker

### **Julie Johnston** gives campers the boot

If hauling a tire across the desert at five in the morning sounds like fun, then Boot Camp Las Vegas is for you.

Six years ago, Julie Johnston, founder of Boot Camp Las Vegas, was overweight and out of shape. She longed for something different when it came to exercising. Johnston nearly joined the military because she knew she would not only get a rigorous daily workout, but someone would be in her face to make sure she completed it. That intrigued her, but Johnston wondered if there was a way to translate that to a more reasonable hour-long class for ordinary people. Rather than enlisting, she opted to create a challenging but interesting class herself. Now, she and many of her campers can't live without it.

"At Boot Camp Las Vegas, we're always looking for new ways to workout. Every class is different," said Johnston.

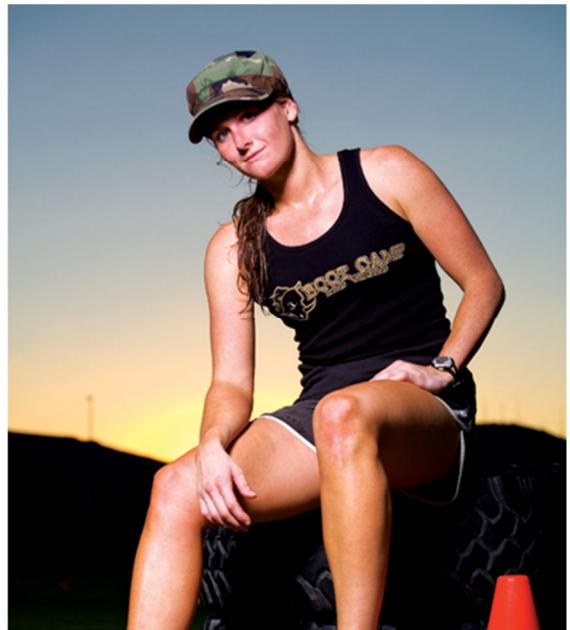
"We take all your childhood games and turn them into nightmares, like tag and leapfrog.

I don't encourage running on pavement, but we do run. We just disguise it by going from checkpoint to checkpoint, or weaving through cones.

"The harder you work, the more calories you burn, the better shape you get in," said Johnston. "If I didn't have my campers, I'd be fat again. You go all out for as long as you can. You can faint or throw up, then get up and do it again."

Johnston isn't kidding about the throwing up bit. Of the 6,000 people who have attended Boot Camp Las Vegas, she alone has had 499 pukers as of press time. "Each puker gets a number and each instructor keeps his or her own count," Johnston explains. "I myself have thrown up 21 times since I started. You don't want to be throwing up every day and, obviously, there are a lot of people that don't. But, instructors do wear t-shirts that say,

Show me what you had for breakfast.



Of course, the quality of the workout is most important, and with 72 weekly classes to choose from at various times and locations, there's lots of hard work going on. In addition to just us regular folk, professional athletes have trained with the campers, and Johnston's instructors have taught a high school wrestling team, a rugby team and Air Force and Army cadets.

Boot camper Richene Plummer used to be a professional ballet dancer, but hadn't worked out in quite some time when a friend told her about Boot Camp Las Vegas. She's now down three pant sizes and recently completed her third triathlon.

"It's hard work but it's not hard to do," said Plummer. "Plus, you get a lot of team motivation from the others in the class. There's never a dull moment because nothing is ever the same. It's fun and it's outdoors. I've worked out in 115-degree heat in the summer and in the winter with the snow blowing sideways. I never thought I'd get in this good of shape.

"After awhile, I decided to challenge myself by doing triathlons," continued Plummer. "When you compete, they write your age on your calf. I'm 46 years old and I'm passing up contestants who are as young as 26! After more than two years of classes, I'm now teaching as well."

Juan Chivara had been working out most of his adult life, but Boot Camp Las Vegas was a totally different experience for him right from the start. "I used to have office hands," he said. "I don't have office hands any more, but I love every minute of it. There's such a great feeling after workouts. I don't know many people who can say they pulled a truck across the desert. You feel like you can conquer the world!

"At the gym, you're working out all by yourself, but here, it's about the whole team effort," Chivara continued. "You have people cheering you on. They help you push through to another level. It's unlike anything out there. We'll run a mile then run up and down stairs. During class, I hate the instructor, but I love her afterwards!"

"You don't get bored, it's addicting," said Judy Greene. "I was fat and depressed and after a few months, I gained confidence. It changed my life! When I first started, I thought I would die. I couldn't do a bear crawl, and a 50-year-old guy finished, then came back to help me. It's been three years. It's hard and it's grueling, but it's amazing what you can do. The camaraderie is what keeps me going. Now I'm an instructor."

As if the regular workouts aren't enough, it seems the attendees like to let off a little extra steam every few months. So, Johnston created Extreme Challenges. "It's just my regular campers that participate. They want to challenge themselves in a different way. We've jumped off jagged cliffs, run to the top of a mountain and raced team against team carrying loaded stretchers while up to our knees in mud. Everyone says it's the most miserable they've ever been then they want to do it again. We're creating monsters!

"We've figured out how to get regular people into amazing shape," said Johnston. "People show up the first day and don't know what hit them. Then they become addicted. It never ceases to amaze me. Once you do Boot Camp, you can do anything. If anything ever happens to this world, two things will survive: cockroaches and boot campers!"

As a special offer to Luxury Las Vegas readers, you can try one class for free. Just go to [www.BootCampLasVegas.com](http://www.BootCampLasVegas.com) and register online. In the comments section, type "Luxury."

## Ron Frazier puts up a fight at Xtreme Couture

In 2007, when Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) fighter Randy “The Natural” Couture opened his gym in Las Vegas, he brought a whole lot of talent with him.

Xtreme Couture head trainer Ron Frazier has been boxing since he was eight years old. Inspired by watching Mohammed Ali as a child, he joined the Sugar Ray Leonard Youth Foundation. Then, after a long stint as a basketball player, Frazier came to Las Vegas upon retiring. A good friend suggested that he train MMA fighters and boxers.

“I didn’t want to do it,” said Frazier. “But I guess the Jedi knight ploy worked. I was helping out a friend at UNLV when Mike Pyle came in from Denmark to train as an MMA fighter. He was looking for a coach and I told him, ‘Good luck with that.’ Mike’s cousin would come in for coaching then Mike asked me to hold mitts for him.

When he said he had a fight in seven weeks and wanted me to train him, I gave in and told him I would do it.

“After a few weeks, Mike asked me to open the gym at UNLV early because Randy was coming into town to train for a fight. Mike and Randy became great friends, and when Randy needed a coach, I worked with him as well. Before Randy opened Xtreme Couture, we had a core group of guys working out together – Randy, Mike, Forrest Griffin, Tyson Griffin, Martin Kampmann, Jay Hieron, Gray Maynard and Alex Schoenauer. Randy decided he was going to open a gym here and we all stayed with him.”

A graduate of Valley High School, Frazier was always passionate about basketball and felt that was a ticket to a great career. He played in college, as well as overseas in Spain, Germany and Italy. “Basketball is the one thing I always wanted to do. Everything else, I just fell into. In addition to coaching, I also did sports radio in Las Vegas for seven years. I worked hard to learn the business I was in at the time and had great people around me.

“It’s been a wonderful experience at Xtreme Couture,” Frazier continued. “Randy is a great guy. He keeps an open mind and he’s willing to learn from anyone. At the time we met and he needed a boxing coach, there were much bigger names out there, but he gave me that credibility. Our philosophy is to have fun and try to take care of your body the best you can.”

P.J. Dombrowski has been a member since Xtreme Couture’s doors opened. His fitness background is strong and varied, having participated in martial arts since he was seven years old, played college football and kick boxed as well. He’s won Grappler’s Quest, a jujitsu tournament, three times. “What keeps me at Xtreme Couture is I have the opportunity to train with great coaches from so many different disciplines. I primarily do boxing and jujitsu, but after a fight I can look at where my weaknesses are then focus on strengthening those areas.

“If you want to learn, you have the opportunity here,” Dombrowski continued. “We have all levels of training, from beginners up to pros. Once you get the basics, the coaches will move you up to the next level. They’ll point out where you’re weak and encourage you to train in those areas. This is a great gym because everything is under one roof, including training, fitness, kettle ball and open gym. We’re



like family here. We all get along really well. The coaches get to know you personally, so they know how to motivate you and point you in the

right direction.”

Scott Kelsey, a local attorney and gym member, played football most of his life and worked out regularly either at a gym or by doing a bit of boxing. He'd been an MMA fan for years, and after much contemplation, Kelsey got up the nerve to train for a fight at Xtreme Couture.

“I have a very busy day job, but I thought it would be fun to participate in an MMA event,” said Kelsey. “I decided if I was going to do it, I'd train with the best. So far I've had two fights.

“What I love about Xtreme Couture is the motto of the gym is ‘check your ego at the door.’ You'll have kids who come in here and want to be tough, but they'll soon get their philosophy changed. The gym has a family atmosphere. Everyone is here to help each other, whether you're a beginner or a pro.”

If you thought Xtreme Couture was only for hard-core MMA fighters, you'd be mistaken. The gym has a kids program as well. Kelsey's oldest child is a member, with the youngest soon to join. “The program is aimed at physical fitness and the fundamentals of fighting,” said Kelsey. “Kids learn discipline as well as how to protect themselves. There are people in this world who have bad intentions, and the more you can protect yourself, the better. The kids also learn how to take instruction and criticism, two good skills to have when they grow older.”

Xtreme Couture offers a variety of classes for both men and women, including boxing, jujitsu, wrestling, grappling and muay thai kickboxing. “We don't have a lot of female members right now, but we sure would like to add more,” Frazier said.

You can find all the details about classes and membership at [www.xtremecouture.tv](http://www.xtremecouture.tv).

### **Sue Harragan goes for it – no holds barred**

You don't have to be a professional dancer to sidle up to the barre.

In the midst of one of the worst recessions in history, Barre Las Vegas is growing. Owner Sue Harragan opened two studios in just seven months. The Town Square location greeted its first clients in December 2009; Summerlin opened its doors in July. Hordes of women – and a few men – have discovered just how effective this non-impact workout can be.

“For my entire life, I've been a fitness enthusiast,” said Harragan. “Then, a few years ago, I got sick and couldn't do cardio. I discovered the barre workout in California and absolutely fell in love with it. It's an effective workout that will definitely change your body.”

The barre workout addresses the full body, targeting critical areas like core, thighs and the seat. Women in particular struggle with toning these parts, but



they typically don't want to bulk up. So, the process of working a muscle to exhaustion then stretching it results in long, lean muscles. It works for guys, too, particularly in that muffin-top region above the slacks.

"Most of the time when you're exercising, you are moving by momentum, not necessarily focusing on the muscle," said Harragan. "This is how barre differs. Muscles are contracted and isolated, then stretched. Most people believe that if you're not building up a big sweat, you're not getting a good workout. Here, you'll hardly move a muscle but you'll work harder than you ever have before!"

According to Harragan, the barre workout has been around for years. In the 1970s in New York, it was available only to the elite. Californians have had access to it for a number of years as well, so when Harragan left Southern California and moved to Las Vegas with her husband, she missed her workouts. That prompted her to open her own studio.

"I knew with all the professional dancers in town that it would be a hit," Harragan said, "but you don't have to be a dancer to enjoy it and get a good workout. We have a boutique studio where classes are small and everyone gets the attention they need to do each move properly. It's exciting to come to class because no two classes are ever the same. Plus, you'll be working muscles you never knew you had!"

Client Tammy Spatz is a clinical exercise technician by trade. Since she's in the industry, she's aware of what workout options are available in town and has extremely high standards. She's often snubbed her nose at classes for many reasons, but she absolutely fell in love with the barre workout.

"I took my free introductory class and was blown away by how intense the workout is and how rehabilitative the stretch is," said Spatz. "All the barre instructors have a fantastic kinetic awareness from their training — to make sure that all class participants are doing the moves properly so they don't get hurt. I'm absolutely thrilled with the way the class works. When I do see professional dancers attend, and they do the moves through pursed lips, I know how hard we're working and I feel vindicated.

"I've never had as much flexibility as I do now since studying the barre technique. You get a continuing lengthening of your connective tissue. You don't want to do the same thing every day or you'll suffer from overuse injuries. This builds strength in muscles people don't know they possess. Anyone over the age of 25 should have this as part of their routine. I attend class three to five days a week and it makes me excited to discover there are muscles that need to be strengthened."

Melinda Mejia started working out at Barre Las Vegas in March and was instantly addicted. "I love the classes because they combine a lot of things that are interesting, like yoga, Pilates, ballet and weights along with fast paced, exciting, non-stop fun and work. I try to get there five times a week. I've seen great changes in my body. My arms have never looked better. I'm 46 years old and I'm stronger than I was 20 years ago. I feel healthier, and I have more energy than I've had in years.

"Every instructor is different but they all have great energy," continued Mejia. "Just when you think you can't go any further they change the pace or the body part and you find the inner strength to pull through somehow. The instructors modify the poses to help you, so even if you haven't worked out in awhile, you can still go and reap the benefits. It works me harder than I have in a long time."

"I'm thrilled that Las Vegas has embraced the barre technique," said Harragan. "When people start to comment on how good you look, you feel better. No one can change their bone structure, but you certainly can change how you stand, how flexible you are and the shape of your muscles. We get feedback from a lot of athletes. Golfers open up the hips, tennis players have a better swing, runners

run a faster mile. After a barre workout, you'll feel a good sore. You're feeling it in all the right places. Come and discover it for yourself. You'll be hooked!"

The first class is currently free to locals. Just go to [www.barrelasvegas.com](http://www.barrelasvegas.com) and register online.

### **Sasha Larkin bends the world in her direction**

What do you get when you combine a police officer with a yoga instructor? Yoga cop Sasha Larkin, of course!

Trained in the martial arts since she was 11 years old with a third degree black belt, Sasha Larkin had no clue how yoga would play a role in her life as she got older. "I was in a terrible car accident in 1999 right after graduating from the police academy and I lost mobility in my lower spine," said Larkin. "I was going to a chiropractor, and she suggested I try yoga. I attended an Ashtanga class, and never went back to the chiropractor. I realized the yoga would heal my body.

"There are different types of yoga, and new ones are popping up all the time," continued Larkin. "I started out with Ashtanga because it is very athletic with a prearranged set of moves. You do them the same way every time. It warms the body first then you work on balance and strength. It gives you the opening your body needs to move forward and it's put forth in a very intelligent manner. I did it six days a week for nine months, and I feel it healed me from the inside out."



During one particular class, Larkin's instructor had to leave for a family emergency. She gave Larkin the keys to the studio and asked her to finish in her stead. "That's when I realized what yoga is — the ability to stay calm in the midst of a terrible storm," said Larkin. "In spite of the severity of the emergency, my instructor never lost it. Her family recovered and a lot of that was her positive energy. We approach dire situations very similarly in the police world. If someone is shot and they are unconscious, we only speak positively about pulling through because we know they can still hear us."

Larkin had always wanted to be a police officer. When she was a child, she was only allowed to watch two shows — "The Smurfs" and "CHiPs". "I fell in love with Larry Wilcox. I told my mom at age 3 that's what I wanted to do.

She thought I'd become an actor after I graduated from high school since so many classmates acted professionally, and I had taken ballet since I was very young. When I moved to Las Vegas for grad school, I did get a job as a showgirl at the Stardust, but I quickly learned I wouldn't make enough money to pay for tuition. So, I got a job as a bartender. Some Metro officers came in and we spent a lot of time talking about their work.

"They told me if I joined the force my tuition would be paid for, which sounded good to me. I joined in 1998 and I never looked back. I didn't finish grad school because my police training was so time consuming. Then once I started yoga, I decided if I went back to school, it would be for something different. Metro and yoga changed the course of my life.

"In my line of work, you need a release, an outlet, and yoga is that release for me," continued Larkin. "I work in the roughest areas of town and manage a problem solving unit, so it often involves robberies or something with a violent nexus to it. You can become very cynical in law enforcement and yoga has taught me to see people deeper, beyond their exteriors. Now I'm creating a community outreach program. It's great to be involved with something like this from the ground up."

Larkin advises potential students that it's a process and a dedication. "You don't realize how beneficial it is until you do it."

I try to get my students to connect with their bodies. So many people today don't eat right or sleep enough. I spend a lot of time trying to teach them to become aware of their bodies through their breath and connecting it with their movements. If your breath is out of whack, so is your mind. You don't need a special reason to try yoga like I did. You just need to be okay with the journey and find your inner strength."

Angela Woolard has been a Larkin student since she began teaching. "Sasha definitely keeps me coming back. She's very relaxed and confident when she teaches," explains Woolard who has been doing yoga since 1999. "Sasha really pulls the best pose out of you. She's brilliant at adjustments and fantastic verbally. You know what you're meant to be doing."

"Sasha's a pro at getting you to work hard but not having it seem like you are," Woolard continued. "The sequence she does has a very slow build in terms of you exerting yourself. You're in the moment and sweating like crazy then you realize you're working very hard. She explains what you're doing in an illustrative manner which makes you work better and more effectively."

Lisa Livingstone has been a student of yoga for 18 years, and one of Larkin's students for five years. "I've studied with world renowned yoga instructors, mostly in Los Angeles. I just happened upon Sasha and I thought she was amazing! I'd put her right beside the other instructors I've worked with."

"Sasha is connected to her spirit and her soul, so in return she connects to other people's spirits and souls," Livingstone continued. "She has an ancient energy about her. She makes you feel welcome and warm and her kindness embraces you. I have a connection with her that runs deep — more so than other people in the yoga world I've come in contact with. I'm sure a lot of people feel the same way. Sasha touches a lot of people's hearts."

Larkin teaches at Sherry Goldstein's Yoga Sanctuary. You can find out more information at [www.lasvegasyoga.com](http://www.lasvegasyoga.com).