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PALMETTO BAY

Kids see fit to slim down at new gym

■ Childhood obesity and problems resulting from a lack of physical activity are addressed by the center's workouts.

BY SAUDY PEÑA
Special to The Miami Herald

At a new children's gym called Meltdown Station, 9-year-old Anais Shaw exercised to a fitness video, stretching and gyrating with five other children and teenagers.

"Come on, baby!" owner Ivette Cortiella yelled to the sweating group. "Let me see you. I know you can do it."

Cortiella, who opened the gym at 9220 SW 158th Ln. in December and runs it with her daughter Karina Lugo, 17, says Meltdown Station is a concept long overdue: a gym aimed at getting youths age 5 to 17 into shape.

"There's an epidemic going on in this country with childhood obesity," she said. "... Our goal here is to try and turn that tide around and offer a one-stop place where kids and teens have a place to come to for attaining wellness and reaching their fitness goals."

The American Obesity Association reports that "today's youth are considered the most inactive generation in history, caused in part by reductions in school physical education programs and unavailable or unsafe community recreational facilities."

Memberships begin at \$30 a week, according to the gym's website, www.meltdownstation.com.

On a wall near the entrance, "before" and "after" photos show how youths have transformed their bodies since coming to

the gym. Anais' pictures show her slowly slimming down, her belly shrinking and her physique becoming better-proportioned.

"I now come like four times a week, once on Saturday," said the fourth-grader at Frank C. Martin Elementary School. "I've even brought some of my friends. I tell them they should come to this gym because it's for kids."

Shaw's mother, Maxi Estevez, 35, said she was pleased by the changes.

"She needed to lose weight," Estevez said of her daughter. "She's been doing ballet. We've tried going for walks. But when I'd take her she didn't want to do it. It bored her. When we found out about the gym through a friend, she was the one that wanted to come. It's really helped with her energy level — it's gone up and she's not as cranky."

Cortiella said through referrals from doctors, she has helped kids take the initiative to exercise.

"There's so much for them to take advantage of here," she said of the fitness center, which she designed to look like a space station, including a space pod bathroom and a giant photo of the Earth in the cardio workout area. "What you're going to get are kids and teens who can focus better in school, who feel better about themselves because they see their bodies changing."

Earlier this year, Cortiella partnered with Tito Frias, a former minor-league baseball player, to train some of the kids in his Diamond II baseball program.

"Down the road we can get more sports in here —



CHARLOTTE SOUTHERN/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

STEP BY STEP: Nel Barreiro, 18, exercises with Brianna Ferrer, 8, on the Dance Dance Revolution machine.

basketball, football — and get kids who are not involved in any of them to participate," Frias said.

Patrons also can work out on video-game racing bikes that they have to pedal; a "dance revolution" machine that tests footwork; and kinetic Ping Pong games.

There are also cardio and resistance floor exercises, hydraulic machines made for youngsters and one-on-one fitness training.

When the thirst builds, there's bottled water and other refreshments.

Cortiella previously created Superfits Enterprises, a multivitamin, sports apparel and kids' workout video

company. Her interest stemmed from her own struggle to lose weight and eat better, she said.

Cortiella developed a fitness plan and soon lost the weight, landing in Hollywood as a fitness model and instructor.

Janette Horowitz, 13, said she was happy to attend Meltdown Station. After only one week, she already felt the impact, she said.

"I'm just more comfortable that it's geared for us," said the Southwood Middle School eighth-grader. "My goal is to change my diet and get into a nice bathing suit. That means feeling better inside and out."

REDLAND COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Leader of recall effort may be charged

■ An activist heading a recall effort aimed at ex-Redland Community Council Chairwoman Pat Wade is facing charges from the state Elections Commission for violating campaign finance laws.

BY REBECCA DELLAGLORIA
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The Florida Elections Commission has found probable cause to charge Ken Forbes — who launched an unsuccessful recall campaign against then-Redland Community Council Chairwoman Pat Wade — with violating campaign finance laws.

Forbes, who formed the Committee Against Useless Self-serving Efforts, or CAUSE, faces four charges that he made or authorized prohibited expenditures; certified a treasurer's report that was "incorrect, false or incomplete;" and did not list the issues the political action committee was supporting or opposing on its statement of organization.

The complaints were filed by John Wade, Pat Wade's husband.

Chief among the alleged violations: a \$2,200 check from the committee's campaign account that Forbes made out to himself and told investigators was used to pay poll workers, a commission report said.

Florida law prohibits making cash payments to poll workers. The report said Forbes "should have paid each worker with a campaign check and then listed

•TURN TO CHARGES, 8

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Gym opens in Palmetto Bay

BY LINDA RODRIGUEZ BERNFELD

Children who are overweight have a tough time in school because they often are teased about their looks.

Ivette Cortiella knows what it's like to be overweight. She once weighed more than 200 pounds. She lost weight by purchasing offered on television and is now a fitness model for them. From what she learned, she developed fitness programs for kids.

She opened Meltdown Station to help kids do something to get rid of that unwanted weight. Meltdown Station is located at 9220 SW 158 Lane, near Brandsmart, Marshall's and LA Fitness in Palmetto Bay.

"We work with children and teens," Cortiella says.

Meltdown station has supervised strength training and cardiovascular programs plus non-competitive routines that help maintain health and fitness as well as age specific equipment.

"We have no contracts and we have a fully-certified, background-checked staff," Cortiella says. "We have hydraulic machines, Dance Revolution machines and we have game bikes that are connected to Playstation 2s. They have to pedal or the PS 2s won't work."

Parents can chose between two package programs or they can opt for an hourly program at \$10 an hour plus tax.

Meltdown Station is the offshoot of another company Cortiella owns, Superfit Enterprises.

"They are packages you would buy online," she says. "It's a six-week course on DVD."

Cortiella had a good success rate with the Little Kickers and Teen Heat Home Fitness programs, but some parents would tell her, "My child won't do it, I need to motivate them."

That motivated Cortiella to open the gym. She is giving the gym several months to see how it works out before deciding to open others around Miami and then possibly expand to the north.

Meltdown Station caters to children from five to 17 years old. There is also a



Meltdown Station owner Ivette Cortiella.

program called Child and Me, where the parent comes and works out with the child so that they motivate each other.

The kids don't just come in and work out and leave. They are monitored throughout the workout so they are using the machines correctly and getting the most from their time at the gym.

Kids' workouts start with cardio exercises and then some stretching, before working on machines that are geared to the child's size. Some machines are for kids five to 12 and others are for kids 13-17.

Working out is fun for the kids and they are given incentives to make them work hard. Those incentives include trips to Disney World and coupons to Subway Restaurants.

After just a few weeks, the children can see results in their toned bodies. The Meltdown Station staff also works with the parents to make sure they are doing their part to help the kids eat properly, ensuring their hard work isn't lost when they go home and eat.

Once the kids see the changes, they are even more motivated to keep things going and they are the ones who make sure they eat the right foods.

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