

# A before look at my 'after' shot

BY JENNIFER KEIRN, Contributing Editor

**I** HAVE A dirty little secret. For much of the last year I've been writing for Fitness Business News, I was not actually a member of a fitness club.

I blame my husband, a bastion of self-motivation who eschews clubs of any kind, instead choosing to work out at home in solitude. With his recent investment in an expensive home elliptical, I found it hard to justify the additional expense of a club membership, instead following his lead to our lonely, dark basement for workouts.

I, however, am not blessed with my husband's fitness discipline.

Left to my own devices, I'll patter along on the elliptical while reading the paper, barely breaking a sweat, and before I know it something shiny has distracted me from my workout. At home, the demands of family and work were in constant competition with my fitness goals, and they frequently won, causing me to lapse into an exercise regimen that was spotty at best.

Working out at home was not working out.

But in what I can only interpret as a divine message – “*thou shalt join a fitness club now*” – a recent move to a suburb of Cleveland put us within a 10-minute drive of the club voted best in the area in numerous surveys, Lifeworks of Southwest General Hospital.

So in December, I left behind my dusty hand weights and stability ball and signed myself up, turning

right away to Lifeworks personal trainer Karin Cottman for help.

As part of my membership, I received six free 30-minute visits with Cottman, during which she instructed me on using Lifeworks' cardio and strength training equipment – all networked with the FitnessAdvisor tracking system – and administered a full fitness assessment, capped off with a report and fitness plan generated by the Visual Fitness Planner software.

I went into my fitness assessment downright cocky. I mean, sure, I have a deficiency of self-motivation and I'd gone through a bit of a fitness lapse. But I couldn't be too out-of-shape, could I?

Boy, was I wrong.

My flexibility and grip strength were downright embarrassing. My waist-to-hip ratio put me in a warning category for heart disease, and my body fat percentage had me inching toward the high end of “acceptable.” My VO<sub>2</sub>max was hovering between “below average” and “poor” for my age. While my weight and BMI – the only two predictors of fitness I'd ever paid attention to – were within normal ranges, it was clear that I had some lifestyle changes to make.

We entered all of this evidence of my pathetic performance into the Visual Fitness Planner software and *presto!* there was a rotating 3-D Virtual Me that looked pretty much like Real Me except for some added curves that I really must



For joining a new club, Lifeworks of Southwest General Hospital, Jennifer Keirn received six sessions with a trainer, a fitness assessment, and a diet and exercise plan created by the Visual Fitness Planner software.

publicly thank VFP's programmers for. Unfortunately, with only a few pounds to lose, the rendering of my body shape after meeting my fitness goals was interesting but not useful, looking nearly identical to my “before” image.

But what was useful was the way the system calculated how a change in diet and exercise would impact my risk factors for diabetes, heart disease, cancer and more. With just a few mouse clicks, I could see how eating right or exercising an additional day each week would impact my goals, as well as how adding personal training would help me reach them faster. The system then generated a customized fitness plan for me tailored to my goal of gaining muscle that included tips on proper diet, water intake and physical activity.

According to Karen Raisch-Siegel, Lifeworks' executive director, the Visual Fitness Planner process provides a good kick-start for new members, particularly those whose changes in body shape or risk factors are dramatic.

“Seeing the body change is fun, but it's really seeing the health risks change that gets them,” she

told me. “It's a motivator to get them going.”

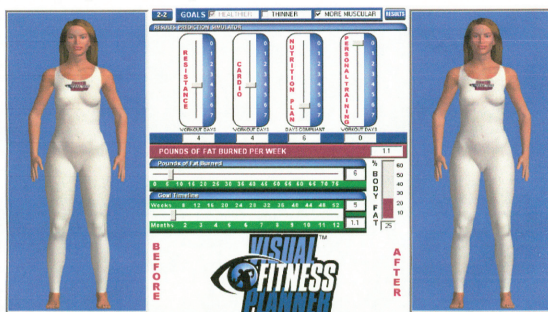
Raisch-Siegel said VFP also helps convert new members from their initial set of six free appointments into personal training. About 40 percent of Lifeworks members who begin the free appointments complete all six, and of those 30 percent purchase a personal training package.

I was one of those who eagerly signed up for personal training on the spot with my new BFF Karin Cottman, who had been so encouraging and gentle during my fitness assessment. Then the butt-kicking began.

Gone are the days of my leisurely elliptical jaunts with newspaper in hand. Cottman has delivered exactly what I needed and could not achieve at home – a challenging workout and the accountability required to help me stick to my new routine.

Like a veal calf newly released from her cage – or should I say, basement – I'm using long-neglected muscles to stretch and lift my way toward becoming a new me, that healthier, stronger, leaner Virtual Me. **FBN**

This Plan Prepared for: *Jennifer Keirn*



**Visual Fitness Planner gives users a virtual before-and-after picture so they can visualize what they will look like at their target weight.**