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HEALTH

## Basic Training

Central Park Becomes World's Largest Gym For One NYC Trainer Serious About Fitness

By Michael Y. Park

For too many people in New York, keeping in shape means filing into a generic fluorescent-lit gym and waiting their turn to spend an hour on a treadmill or do a couple sets on a sweat-drenched fitness machine. For Stacy Berman, keeping in shape means spending an hour pretending to be in a boot camp in Central Park. "We're breaking fitness out of the four walls of the gym and taking it to the great outdoors," she says.

Berman is the creator of Stacy's Boot Camp ([www.stacysbootcamp.com](http://www.stacysbootcamp.com)), a year-round fitness program in which she acts as a drill sergeant taking groups of New Yorkers through an intensive, military-style regimen of push-ups, pull-ups, lunges, jogging, sprints, climbing up the park's stairways, "centipedes," squats, squat thrusts, "bear crawls" and anything else the longtime fitness instructor can devise. None of the exercises uses anything more than each person's own body weight and the expanse of Central Park.

It's a program that Berman, a New York Sports Clubs master trainer, thought up three years ago as a way to break from the standard concept of an urban workout. "People get so bored of the being in the gym, in these four walls, this artificial setting where it's the same thing over and over again," she says. "It's totally monotonous and totally demotivating. When you're outdoors, you get to use the natural terrain, you get to enjoy the camaraderie of the group and the fresh air."

The native New Yorker also sees the alfresco athletics as a much more complete workout than the ones most people get. When she begins a three-week, three-time-a-week program, she asks everyone to rate their own fitness on a scale of one to 10. Most people rank themselves a five or six. By the end of the first workout, many people re-rate themselves a three, Berman says.

"You go to the gym, do a leg press or a chest press and rest, and that's great, you have a strong chest or legs," she says. "But fitness incorporates cardio, strength, flexibility. If you incorporate all things into one workout, that's real fitness."

Even longtime athletes find the boot camp challenging. Columbia University graduate student Bethany Aquilina, 26, was a longtime marathon runner when she joined Berman's classes last July. She says her first session was an epiphany. "The first time you go is one of the most painful experiences of your life," she says. "Anyone who thinks they're in shape realizes their muscles have not worked this way before, and no matter how fit you are, it's always a challenge. But doing something different every time and constantly challenging my body has put me in the best shape I've been in for a while."

The \$250 program isn't for the fainthearted, though. Classes are held rain or shine, no matter how cold or hot it gets outside. And Berman, a fan of the movie "Full Metal Jacket," doesn't coddle anyone, an attitude some students resent. "I'm not sitting there yelling at them, but I am pretty tough, and they do call me a bitch sometimes," she says.

LISTINGS

### Prospect Park Green Team

11/03/2004-12/29/2004,  
3:30 pm- 5:00 pm  
Prospect Park Audubon Center & Visitor Center at the Boathouse - just inside the Lincoln Road/Ocean Ave entrance to Prospect Park, Brooklyn

### Holiday Fair in Grand Central

11/23/2004-12/24/2004, All Day, Mon-Sat: 10:00 AM 8:00 PM; Sunday, 12:00 PM 6:00 PM  
Vanderbilt Hall, Grand Central Terminal, Manhattan

### Holiday Laser Light Shows in Grand Central

11/23/2004-12/31/2004, 11:00 am- 9:00 pm,  
Five-minute shows play on the hour and half hour  
Main Concourse, Grand Central Terminal, Manhattan

### Bryant Park Holiday Market

11/26/2004-1/02/2005, All Day, Mon-Fri: 11:00 AM - 7:00 PM; Sat-Sun: 10:00 AM - 8:00 PM; Extended hours as the holidays approach  
Bryant Park, Manhattan

### Union Square Holiday Market

11/26/2004-12/24/2004, All Day, Mon - Fri: 11:00 AM - 8:00 PM; Saturday: 10:00 AM - 8:00 PM; Sunday: 11:00 AM - 7:00 PM  
Union Square, Manhattan

### Rockefeller Center's Christmas Tree on Display

11/30/2004-1/06/2005, 5:30 am- 11:30 pm  
Rockefeller Center, Manhattan

### Silhouette Making Workshop

12/04/2004, 1:00 pm- 4:00 pm  
Morris-Jumel Mansion - 65 Jumel Terrace at 160th Street, Harlem Heights, Manhattan

### Coffee Bark @ Fort Tryon Park

12/05/2004, 8:00 am- 10:00 am  
Meet at Sir William's Dog Run, Fort Tryon Park (by the Gazebo), Manhattan

The fact that Berman's studio is also New York City's backyard brings up a whole host of other issues that never come up at the local gym. "There's one guy who's scared of dogs," she says. "And we get yelled at sometimes by bike riders."

Nevertheless, the program has been thriving, and Berman has expanded classes to Battery Park City, Riverside Park and has even been asked to bring the boot camp to Long Island and Philadelphia. Her clients range in age from 18 to 59 and include librarians, fashion designers, magazine publishers, lawyers, dentists and aspiring models. Many, like Aquilina, are now committed regulars.

Despite her demanding attitude, every now and then Berman shows her soft side. She plans on putting together a boot-camp picnic for her clients -- sans push-ups. "As hard as the boot camp is, it's also a lot of fun," Aquilina says.

***Michael Y. Park is the news editor of New York Resident. Please send responses to him at [michaelp@resident.com](mailto:michaelp@resident.com).***

