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## CrossFit trend expands in Palo Alto

*Three CrossFit locations open in city this year*

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The fog outside the open garage door at Troy Obrero's "box" hadn't yet burned off when Christa Root started lifting kettle balls at 6:30 a.m. Root, a kidney-disease researcher, works out five times a week at Obrero's Prometheus, sprinting and heaving tires across the parking lot, completing sets of snatch lifts and doing headstands.

What she was doing is called CrossFit, a new intensive group fitness program that incorporates weight lifting with cardio and body-weight exercises (such as push-ups and pull-ups). CrossFit was developed by Greg Glassman in his Santa Cruz gym in 1995. He began posting his workouts online, and avid followers were soon opening their own CrossFit gyms, called "boxes," in home garages, warehouse spaces and on military bases.

In the past year, three CrossFit boxes have opened in Palo Alto, two on El Camino Real and one on San Antonio Road.

Boxes tend to be smaller than conventional gyms, and at \$120 to \$180 a month, a bit pricier for members. But with CrossFit trainers filling the classes that start at 5 and 6 a.m., the trend appears to be taking hold.

Some participants say they like the motivational aspect of working out in a group. It's a customizable "one size fits all" method, where diverse groups with different skills and abilities can perform the same exercises with varying weights and at a range of speeds.

"At a regular gym, I might elliptical with headphones on; here it's about being with people," Amity CrossFit member and actress Adrienne Walters said.

CrossFit Palo Alto member Buddy Brewer, a software product manager who works at home, also comes for the social aspect.

"I moved here and I didn't have an office where I could socialize every day," he said.

"We're like a big family," biomedical informatics researcher and CrossFit Palo Alto regular Sean Falconer said. When he moved here from Canada, everyone who helped him was from his local CrossFit gym.

"You're in an area where people are forging elite families and elite companies," Obrero said. "So the elite fitness makes sense. There are a lot of high achievers, Type A personalities in this valley. This is the perfect methodology for this type: efficient and motivational."

Others like the functional mentality of CrossFit. Dr. Dan Sedehi, a patron of CrossFit Palo Alto, found it addictive because it gave him a new attitude when going to the gym -- to "get stronger rather than bigger."

Kim Ryan, whose husband, Aaron, owns the Amity box at 3516 El Camino Real, said the draw for her was the focus on performance.

"I've never been a small girl. At CrossFit being Twiggy isn't the goal. All types of bodies and people do this, and for the first time I feel like an athlete and a team member."

But there's a caveat. The training has, quite literally, pushed people to death. According to a May 2008 ABC News online article, CrossFit founder Glassman has documented at least five cases of CrossFitters suffering from rhabdomyolysis, a life-threatening condition in which intense exercise causes muscles to break down too quickly. When

the toxic byproduct reaches the kidneys it can cause kidney failure.

Less life-threatening but unpleasant nonetheless are the back problems that can plague inexperienced weight lifters who lack proper training.

Because CrossFit is so interdisciplinary, "people will push themselves to do gymnastics like gymnasts, lift like lifters or sprint like sprinters," Obrero said. Very few people can, he added, noting that many hurt themselves trying.

For this reason, at Prometheus, Obrero requires people new to CrossFit to take an introductory course that focuses on safety, proper techniques and gym etiquette.

Aaron Ryan, owner of Amity CrossFit, emphasized the need for proper coaching and constant supervision, as well as scaling back workouts to an individual's fitness level.

Tim Dymmel, owner of CrossFit Palo Alto, errs on the side of under programming, of taking the time to learn proper movement.

"I tell people in our 'define the relationship' conversation that I'm a long-term relationship kind of guy. I don't want to destroy you."

Dymmel started CrossFit Palo Alto in his garage but moved to 4050 El Camino Real last October when the local homeowners' association didn't appreciate the extra cars parked on his street at 6 a.m.

In July, Ryan opened Amity, Palo Alto's newest box, in an industrial building that once housed an auto shop. Ryan got his start managing an Equinox gym and teaching kickboxing and mixed martial arts. When Ryan wanted to teach CrossFit classes, the other Equinox managers were not keen on the idea due to the added noise of some of the weight lifting.

In sessions, Ryan incorporates large amounts of Olympic lifting, since strength is often what people lack. He plans to include kickboxing and jujitsu in the future.

Obrero, a former competitive weight lifter, and co-founder and wife Lori Giver, a former gymnast, started Prometheus last September. They, too, began in their Sunnyvale garage before expanding into warehouse space at 716 San Antonio Road.

Obrero owns a DNA-sequencing company, and Giver serves as vice president of research and development at a biotech company. They both value science at their self-proclaimed geek-centric box. Many of their members are from the biotech industry. (They give a 20 percent "geek" discount, and voting members of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering or Medicine train for free.)

Though it's not for everyone, CrossFit devotees such as Root say for them it's worth the cost and early hours to find a good workout match. After trying gyms in Redwood City and Mountain View she found Obrero's weight-lifting expertise to be just what she was looking for.

"Like 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears,' keep searching until you find the gym that suits your needs," she said.

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