

Linton Fitness



Owner: Zila Oliveira
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hat happens when you've lived in big cities all your life and then move to a small town and find there is no fitness center, coffee shop or women's clothing store? Well, if you are Zila Oliveira, you start your own business!

Because she and her husband have backgrounds in medicine, Zila decided the fitness center was most important. She was a clinical psychiatrist in Minneapolis before she retired. Her husband, Edgar, is a physician. He came to Linton to help another doctor and was asked to stay. So Zila moved to small town North Dakota, and loves it!

"This is a paradise for senior citizens: low crime, low cost, and great quality of life. It's a treat for me to live here. The people are so nice and I wouldn't have dreamed of starting my own business in a big city. Here, I just pick up the phone and call Sharon."

Sharon Jangula is the Linton Industrial Development Coordinator. She put Zila in contact with people in the community who could give her loans for her fitness project. Those included the SBDC, Lewis and Clark Regional Development Council, Dakota CDC, and BNC bank. Sharon also found Zila a building for her business. "It's owned by the

city and they remodeled it—roof, floor, everything—and let me choose colors, etc."

Oliveira says she's also lucky to have two very intelligent sons, who helped her with the project. One son, a former tennis player, helped her with the layout of the fitness center and the exercise equipment; the other son helped with the administrative details and manages the Linton Fitness web site. Both live on the West Coast. "I couldn't have done this without my family, including Edgar. They are all proud that mom is doing something in retirement."

Right now, Zila still works in the center because it only opened a few months ago. But she'd like to eventually turn it over to managers so she can come and go as she pleases. She has two full time employees and two parttime workers who rotate with her on the weekends. Linton Fitness is open 6 am to 9 pm during the week and 8 to 8 on Saturdays. In the winter, it will be open in the afternoons on Sundays, too. Oliveira says, "As the weather gets cooler, business is picking up. We have 200 members and the majority of them are 50+. Some have lost 12 pounds; some have lost 60. We all know that exercise is important; it's just hard to get some people to leave the house to do it!"

Zila says the people in Linton take a lot of pride in the fitness center, which is a large facility consisting of 6 cardio machines, 7 weight lifting machines, 12 hydrolic machines, a free weight station, and a large exercise room with mirrors. She has a teacher coming from Bismarck once a week to teach yoga and another one may come to teach ballroom dance. One of her employees is getting certified to become a personal trainer.

Oliveira's future plans are to visit with local chiropractors, physicians and physical therapists because many of her clients are elderly. She says, "When some of my members are finished with rehab, they come to me to exercise, but I really can't help them if I don't know what they need." Zila also wishes insurance providers would provide incentives for exercise, especially in small towns where there may not be a large enough population of people on any one policy to be able to obtain fitness discounts. That would help her grow her clientele. "This is all new to me. I never had a business before. It's scary in a way, but if it doesn't work, I'm old enough to know it isn't the end of the world!"

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