

UTMOST: WHO ELSE IS IN THE GYM?

Written by Bob Sisson



Swiss ball, safety squat bar, dumbbells. Bench press, rowing, lateral pulldown. Deadlift.

Linda Markee, 82, said she wasn't familiar with any of those terms before she started training with a supportive group of women at Utmost Athletics last summer. Although she's an avid bicyclist, "I'd never worked out with weights or anything in that room," she said. "I had to learn a new language to be there. Now I really enjoy it, and I know I'm stronger."

Of the 129 people training at Utmost, more than half are high school and college athletes. But 54 others are well into adulthood. Twenty-two of them, like Linda, work out Monday, Wednesday and Thursday

mornings in an adults-only session. The other adults are in multigenerational sessions throughout the week.

"It's a very happy place and there's so much joy there," Linda said. "I never, ever thought I'd do this, so it's surprising that I am."

For Katie Buck, 68, Utmost is about accountability and relationships. "If these women weren't here, I wouldn't be doing this. Working out isn't my favorite thing, but I know I have to do it. And these women are very encouraging to each other."

They're also inspirational. The women in the Monday-Wednesday-Thursday session get in a circle and pray together after working out. That was the idea of Claudia Galicia, who said getting fit with friends at Utmost made her diabetes and high blood pressure disappear.

Utmost director Jun Jeong, 30, said some of the adults hadn't worked out since they were young, and it took time to build them up. It was worth it. "We're not trying to make them Olympic athletes, but to focus on strength, mobility and, most importantly, the confidence to know they are capable," he said. "What a blessing it is to be on that journey with them."

For Alan Masden, in his 70s, working out in a multigenerational session and in the morning adult group meet his goals of being around younger people and getting fit. He calls Jun "one of the most extraordinary coaches I've been around."

Val Coval, 62, said Jun's modifying of activities to older adults' abilities has helped her. "Being involved in this has allowed me to stay active ... to keep moving and to strengthen muscles so you can get up off the floor, out of the chair, lift groceries. We need strength so we can age safely."

Ted Buck, 68, Katie's husband, had quintuple heart bypass surgery last year. A few months later, he started cardiac rehabilitation at Utmost, with some guidance from his health care provider. Besides the benefits of rehab, he said he likes the camaraderie and diversity at Utmost: "I'm working out alongside high school and college students, and on the other side of me is an 86-year-old."

That's Russ Parker, who said he's proud to be Utmost's oldest. "The reason I'm doing this goes back to when I was thinking about longevity and what shape I might be in as I got older. I'd seen friends who kind of stopped living in their 80s, and I didn't want to be that way," Russ said. "My goal is to be as healthy as I can be for as long as I can be. (Utmost) has given me motivation to be all I can be."



CELEBRATING 5 YEARS OF UTMOST ATHLETICS!

This fall marks 5 years of Utmost Athletics! On December 7th about 110 athletes and Forge supporters gathered for dinner to celebrate this milestone and to give thanks for 5 years of strength training, character development and relationship building. Utmost has a wide range of athletes, some that are just beginning their strength training journey and others who are at peak fitness. Our coaches welcome and work with each athlete to meet their fitness goals. We recognized athletes who have been with Utmost since the beginning, even through the "Outdoor Facility Era" during the pandemic. We are thankful that athletes, young and old, have found a home at Utmost. Jun Jeong reminded the group, "Once an Utmost athlete, always an Utmost athlete".



"Life Ready. Job Ready."

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As featured in our cover story, many thanks go to the adult Utmost participants whose support contributes to the goals and vision of the Forge.



Winter is the time of year when our Mowtown student crews are available to hire for seasonal yard projects of all kinds. Call to schedule - for your own benefit or maybe give a Mowtown work day as a gift!

[CLICK HERE TO GIVE](#)

STUDENTS TO EMPLOYEES



Forge Mentors recently concluded their third fall semester working with Hayes Freedom High School freshmen. Each week they focused on a character trait, discussed an ethical dilemma, and spent time reflecting in small groups. A few of the students expressed interest in employment and have since started working with Mowtown on

Saturdays. They help maintain the grounds of Columbia Presbyterian Church and two nearby residential properties.

As these young adults work, they learn about landscaping and yard work, as well as problem solving, safety, and maintaining equipment. This year we are adding on time at the end of the work day to cover life skills trainings: goal setting, professionalism, money management, and personality and gifts assessment.



When Forge students begin a job with Mowtown or find employment in our community, we celebrate by spray painting a hammer and anvil logo on the southwest side of the CPC Office Building. Students and parents are thankful for the supportive learning environment that leads many students to their first jobs.

THANK YOU

On behalf of the entire Columbia Future Forge organization, thank you for supporting us in 2023. We look forward to new opportunities in 2024 and are grateful for your partnership with us.

Matt Overton
Executive Director