

Training boys into men with fun

Ex. Marine Lt. instills physical/mental discipline to local yeshiva students

BY ANDREW COEN

On a typical Friday afternoon, trainer Frankie Mikulka has 20 10 and 11-year-old boys eagerly rush into the Hollywood Atrium Fitness Club to go through one hour of intense exercise. While many youngsters would cry at the pain the Ex. Marine Lt. puts them through, the children have a blast but it is hard to tell who is having more fun.

"Let me here you growl," yells Mikulka as the students run in place before going down on the floor for sit-ups during one of the recent sessions.

The 20 youngsters from local yeshivas in the Five Towns area that train with Mikulka for one hour after school on Fridays just before they observe Shabbos with their families have become a major hit in the Orthodox community, and the Lawrence High School graduate is loving every minute of it. Despite coming from vastly different cultures, Mikulka, a proud Italian-American and the young yeshiva students have begun a growing fondness for each other since the program was launched late last year.

"I'm not with 10-year-old boys, I'm with 10-year-old men and that's the philosophy I try to instill in them," said Mikulka. "We're having a lot of fun."

Mikulka, 53, has experience training a variety of people including a 96-year-old man at Hollywood as well as nuns at the Dominican in Amityville, which was the basis for the recent book, "Changing Habits:

The Caregivers' Total Workout" by author Debbie Mandel.

"He has a wealth of experience," said Bruce Lipsky, the manager of Hollywood.

The Lawrence High School graduate first got the idea to train young yeshiva students after school when he trained a father of one of the boys who suggested such a program would be beneficial to many boys in his son's school. The program started with four and quickly rose to 20 10 and 11-year-olds. The training, which consists of laps, obstacle courses, pushups and games such as touch football and basketball, is designed to teach them how to stay in shape as well as the importance of teamwork.

Prior to training the likes of elderly people, young yeshiva students and nuns, Mikulka served in the Marine Corps in the early 1970's after graduating from Lawrence High School. After departing the marines, the Five Towner continued his intense training with different forms of kick-boxing, boxing and martial arts and began work as a part-time trainer at Hollywood in 1996. In addition to the private training Mikulka conducts, he also runs a warrior boot camp three times a week.

"You come into my class you really have a death wish or you really want to get in shape," joked Mikulka. "I figure I'm teaching them a foundation for life."

"He's a great teacher," said 10-year-old Brett Bruh, one of Mikulka's students who attends school at the Hebrew Academy of



FRANKIE MIKULKA conducts one of his classes for local yeshiva students at the Hollywood Atrium Fitness Club in North Lawrence.

the Five Towns and Rockaway (HAFTR). "He's nice and knows how to play with us."

"He's like strict but also fun," said HAFTR student Sam Levinson.

Working side by side with Mikulka is Simcha Frishman, a former yeshiva student himself who can relate with the children, according to Mikulka. "Simcha is from their world," said Mikulka.

"He's the tough marine and I'm the more softer person," said Frishman of the contrast in styles between he and Mikulka and their approach to the students.

Frishman has enjoyed training the

yeshiva students with Mikulka so much, that he is in the process of starting his own class for 11 to 14-year-olds. "I kind of inspire to be [Mikulka] in my own way," said Frishman. "To me, he's my mentor."

Mikulka said the difference in cultures of the yeshiva students and himself is not a factor at all in his teaching. "I don't see worlds I see 9,10,11 year old kids trying to impress me," said Mikulka. "It's totally satisfying."

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