

Local fitness franchise wants exercise to be kids play

BY TRICIA LYNN SILVA

For Michelle Flores, the order in exercising is fun first; fitness second.

Of course, when you're caught up in the thrill of the interactive arcade craze Dance Dance Revolution or on a stationary bike that doubles as a video-game joystick, it's hard not to have fun, and get fit.

And it's all just for kids.

Flores' business is called NexGym — a fitness concept designed with kids in mind.

Flores recently opened the first NexGym in San Antonio — leasing 3,500 square feet in far North Side office/retail center La Ar-

cata. Located along Loop 1604 and Stone Oak Parkway, La Arcata is being developed by REOC Development LLC.

NexGym is the brain-child of Kevin Bolden, who launched the first facility in the Dallas suburb of Southlake in 2006. While the gyms offer programs for children as young as 3 years of age, the target customers are kids between the ages of 6 to 14 — the ones, who are too old for, say, The Little Gym, but too young to fully take advantage of the larger fitness chains aimed at the big boys and girls.

"There really isn't anything on this scale for them," says Flores of that target mar-

ket.

At least there wasn't — until now.

While Flores' facility is the first NexGym in San Antonio, it will not be the last.

Flores says that NexGym corporate expects to open at least four more sites in San Antonio over the next five years. Areas high on the firm's radar screen include the U.S. Highway 281 corridor, outside of Loop 1604; the Bandera/Loop 1604 trade area; the Interstate Highway 10 corridor near Fair Oaks and Boerne; and the State Highway 151 market.

Flores' own franchise area includes the area inside Loop 1604, between the Loop



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San Antonio's first NexGym location is trying to make it fun for kids to get fit.

1604/Highway 281 and the Loop 1604/Interstate 10 intersections. So it is possible that NexGym would sign licensing agreements with additional franchisees to bulk up its presence in San Antonio.

Game on

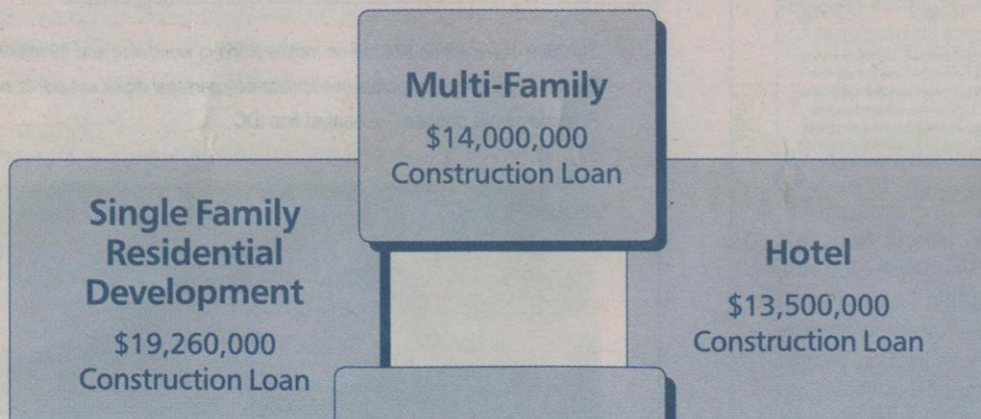
A NexGym includes what is called Exergaming activities — high-tech, interactive games that help kids hone their reaction skills, their hand-eye coordination and their mental acuity. Dance Dance Revolution and the stationary bike/joystick machine are two examples of these Exergames — which teach kids various physical and mental skills, while also causing them to work up a sweat.

Participants can also enjoy martial arts, yoga and cardio classes as well.

There is, however, a time-limit to the fun. Kids can enjoy NexGym for up to two hours a day.

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Keeping them moving is key. According to a survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention between 1976 and 1980, 5 percent of kids in the U.S. between the ages of 2 to 5 years of age were overweight.

A second survey done between 2003 and 2004, showed that the number had jumped to 13.9 percent.

In the 6- to 11-year-old category, the initial study found that 6.5 percent of the children were overweight. By the time of the second survey, the number had jumped to 18.8 percent. For those between the ages of 12 and 19 years, the percentage of overweight kids went from 5 percent to 17.4 percent between the first and second surveys.

It was statistics like these that motivated Bolden to take action back in 2004. At the time, he had been managing the technology of a large consulting firm.

"The obesity trend looked like it wasn't going to stop," he says. "Public schools were cutting back on fitness programs, while adding more unhealthy food choices. Parents complain that they can't get their kids away from the television and video games. And it struck me: Fitness for kids."

Flores says she has already seen a healthy slate of business since her gym opened its doors earlier this month.

"My goal is to build this business off of word of mouth," she says, "to see kids coming in here, wanting to have fun. I love it."