

STYLE

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PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE SAKKESTAD

4EverFit owner Brenda Kashuba is working pro-bono to help Mountain View resident Joan Riskas, 73, lose 100 pounds. Riskas is being sponsored by Jeremy Bloom's Wish of a Lifetime, an organization that grants wishes to senior citizens.

Her wish is coming true, 10 pounds at a time

4EverFit's Kashuba steps up to help

By BRIAN BABCOCK

Joan Riskas had never won anything in her life. So she was skeptical when she received a letter from Jeremy Bloom's Wish of a Lifetime, which grants wishes to senior citizens, telling her that

she could possibly have her most cherished wish come true. But the form didn't ask for money, credit card numbers or any other personal information. There wasn't much to lose, she thought. So Riskas filled it out and wrote down her wish: to lose 100 pounds. Riskas, 73, had just lost her husband Harry, who had suffered from Alzheimer's disease for the past 10 years. She had been his

primary caregiver throughout the last decade. Her life revolved around taking care of her husband and left little time for Riskas to take care of herself. Quick and easy—and very unhealthy—snacks and meals were her go-to source of nourishment. Cheese and crackers were her favorite snack. But the unhealthy lifestyle left her overweight. And the constant physical help she had to give her

husband, such as helping to pick him up or move him, left her with various physical problems. Harry died in May 2010. The next month Riskas was in the hospital for rotator cuff surgery on her left shoulder. She had surgery on her right shoulder years earlier, as well as a left hip replacement and left knee surgery. She was also suffering from planter

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fasciitis in both of her feet and a bone spur in her right foot.

"I'm kind of patched up," she said.

Riskas had already forgotten about the letter she had sent off when she heard back from the Wish of a Lifetime foundation in October. In November, representatives from the foundation visited Riskas at her Mountain View home and let her know that her wish had been granted. They had found a personal trainer in Saratoga who would be willing to take her on for a year pro bono.

Riskas began working out at 4EverFit Personal Training Studio with owner Brenda Kashuba two days a week in January. Riskas has already lost 10 pounds and says she has completely changed her eating habits and works out at home on the days she isn't at the studio.

"There has not been one day where I haven't wanted to work out," Riskas said.

Kashuba, like her newest client, was skeptical when she heard from the foundation. Her first thought was that the company was trying to sell her something. But when she figured out what their true intentions were, she jumped on board.

"These are the type of things I'm interested in being a part of," said Kashuba, who dealt with weight issues for most of her life.

The workouts started off slowly. Riskas could only do about five minutes of cardio work before tiring out. But both women kept working at it. Riskas can now do a full 15 minutes straight of cardio work and finish out an hour training session.

Kashuba told Riskas that there wasn't any miracle diet or workout that was going to help her shed the weight in record time and keep it off. It was going to have to be a lifestyle change.

Whether before, during or after workouts, the two



PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE SAKKESTAD

Mountain View resident Joan Riskas, 73, hopes to lose 100 pounds with help from 4EverFit owner Brenda Kashuba. Riskas was a caregiver for her husband who recently passed away. Riskas says it's time to take care of herself.

would talk about what Riskas was eating, or at least should be eating. The talks changed her client's thinking, Kashuba said.

"Her mind had been opened to the way we need to eat to be healthy. You could see all these light bulbs going on in her head," Kashuba said. Riskas has also been working with certified nutritionist Elaine Murphy, who works with other 4EverFit members.

Although Riskas has come a long way in such a short period of time, she acknowledges that for as much as she wants this for herself, she wouldn't be where she is without help from others.

While Kashuba was willing to give her time to Riskas, there were other things that she needed. Athletic shoes and an exercise bike were at the top of the list.

Kashuba made some calls and found that there were people in the area willing to donate to the cause. Chris-

tine Kennedy of Athletic Performance in Los Gatos donated the shoes, Jeff Slavich, a Saratoga resident who owns Tires Unlimited in San Jose, donated the bike, and Rita Marcojohn of We've Got Your Back in Los Gatos donated Nordic walking poles and lessons.

The charity people have shown has been overwhelming, Kashuba said.

"For me, it's blessed me in so many ways. It's been very touching," she said.

Riskas' journey to a healthy life is far from over. But she says she knows she's on the right path and has dedicated herself to changing her old lifestyle.

And she's already made sacrifices to do just that: no more cheese and crackers.

Keep track of Joan Riskas' progress by visiting her blog at www.joanswish.blogspot.com. For more information on 4EverFit, visit www.4everfit.org. To learn more about Jeremy Bloom's Wish of a Lifetime, visit www.seniorwish.org.