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Weight Watchers

Success agrees with a little girl from Elmhurst

By Shirley Rose Iden
staff writer

A poor little fat girl — that's what the kids down on Elmhurst in Detroit would remember about her.

Now a successful businesswoman who flies all over the country to motivate people and supervise an expansive empire, that's all behind her.

But Florine Mark-Ross hasn't forgotten.

This year the woman many know as "the happy dieter" from the book she authored by that name, celebrates the 20th anniversary of Weight Watchers, two decades of making healthier, happier "losers" out of thousands of men and women.

"Now I have 1,000 classes in the U.S., some in Canada and some in Mexico," she says, trim and chic in a pleated skirt and red suede blazer. "I have the most successful Weight Watcher franchise of all in seven states and three countries."

"I think I'm somebody and I'm glad others think so too." Among those who do are the 1,200 employees, mostly women and all weight watchers employed by her company. Headquarters is a "skinny, narrow building, built that way on purpose," she explains.

A sensitive architect who understood was searched out to design the brick and glass office place on 12 Mile.

BUT MARK-ROSS didn't start out in any made-to-order slimline building. "I put a sign in a candy store on Livernois and Seven Mile," she recalls. "Come lose weight with Weight Watchers," it read.

"I figured fat people go to candy stores and ice cream parlors. It was July 13 and a Tuesday, because Tuesday is a lucky day."

Mark-Ross already felt lucky that day, because her own lifelong battle against obesity seemed finally under control and she was focused on helping people, her own loved ones and others.

Growing up in Detroit in a poor but

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— Florine Mark-Ross

close family, the little girl never recognized her worse enemy, food.

"When I was living on Elmhurst and Linwood, it was a whole, extended family, my grandparents, parents, my aunts, my sister and I," she remembers.

"Food was a big, important part of my life. My grandmother fried everything and all the grownups believed everyone should be fat. If my grandpa saw a skinny couple, he'd say 'he doesn't have a job.'"

"I was always heavy. At age 12, 4 foot 10 inches and 165 pounds, I realized I was fat."

FIRST she decided never to go to gym again, then she bought a giraffe. "When I cried to my mother saying the kids tease me and call me 'Fat Flo,' my mom would hug me and say 'have a piece of cake.'"

When she was 15 she went to the first in a long line of diet doctors. "I took pills and shots of all kinds for 10 years, switching doctors frequently."

"I took uppers, downers, digitals, everything you shouldn't do — but they were all given to me by doctors. Then I had an allergic reaction to a diet pill."

"Today, we'd call it overdosing on speed."

Doctors told Mark-Ross she could never again take those pills or shots or they could be fatal.

"That was when I heard of Weight Watchers," she says. "Jean Nidetch started it in New York and I called her."

Mark-Ross was married and had five children at that time. Her first child had been born when she was 16 during a short-lived marriage. By age 20, she was married again and had four more children in 23 years of marriage.

NOW REMARRIED once more to Bill Ross, an amiable physician who gave her a set of drums for her last birthday, she says, "It gets nicer all the time."

Gearing herself up to shedding the 50 pounds she didn't need meant Mark-Ross had to commute to New York, the only place there were Weight Watcher classes at the time.

"I lost my weight, but I had another reason for making it work for me and others. I wanted to help my sister, Sandy Berlin, walk."

Her sister had contracted polio in 1948 just before the perfection of the vaccine. She languished in hospitals for three years. "We were very poor and who had insurance in those days?" she says.

The happy dieter admits she has an eating disorder that her sister and her two daughters also suffer from it. "It's just like alcoholism," she contends, "I have to control it one day at a time."

There are three kinds of eating disorders: compulsive, bulimic and anorexic.

"I am a compulsive eater."

Back in 1965 when she joined Weight Watchers, she learned she could lose weight without pills or shots by eating three well-rounded meals daily, even in-between-meal snacks.

"After all the fad diets and the miserable experiences with pills, the program was a revelation," she says. "Within 15 weeks, I had lost more than 40 pounds and was determined to bring the program to Michigan."

"WHEN I started Weight Watchers, I wanted to give all the profits to charity, but the lawyer said: 'You'll be successful and give to charity, but make this a profit-making business.'"

There have been profits and always the chance to give to worthy charities. Presently 16 Weight Watcher classes are scheduled for the mentally retarded and Mark-Ross has become an active force in the community for the March of Dimes, hospitals, and other caring groups.

Calling herself a "motivator and public speaker" who travels at least one week a month, she says: "I can do that because my son is the administrator and my sister is the treasurer."

Today's Weight Watchers has an exercise program called "Pepstep," plans on pre-paid programs, has classes for singles and small groups, even one-on-one and has meetings in hospitals and corporate settings.

"Fat people give themselves so many bad messages. We try to change that. Positive things happen when we think well of ourselves."

FREQUENT appearances on the media mean that she's recognized wherever she goes. "I love every moment of my life. People come to me in restaurants and say 'What are you eating?'"

"When people ask for my autograph, I give it and thank them."

"One time I had to charter a plane."

Florine Mark-Ross, who oversees 1,000 Weight Watcher classes in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, talks about growing up in Detroit when she was known as "Fat Flo." Today she is known as "the happy dieter" and is celebrating National Weight Watchers 20th anniversary.



she recalls. "I had been asked to take over the Boston franchise."

"I was scared to death in that little airplane."

"I told myself I can't believe that the little girl from Elmhurst is in this plane going to buy a big business. But I don't take it for granted."

For her family is still the focal point. Having 50 for a Passover Seder or large numbers for a party at any time is part of the joy of being healthy and loving.

"The family is everything," she says. "We were really poor and I can never forget where I came from."

Scouter honored

Dr. John H. Richardson was among eight Clinton Valley Council Boy Scouts of America volunteers presented the Silver Beaver Award, bestowed upon volunteer scouters for exceptional and noteworthy service to youth by National Council, Boy Scouts of America.

The Farmington resident received the award at the council's annual spring meeting in Pontiac Silverdome's "Main Event" banquet room.

The Silver Beaver Award is presented for service of exceptional character to the youth within the territory of the Clinton Valley Council.

The recipients have a minimum of 10 years service as a registered scouter, and although scouting service is the basic requirement for this award, the honorees have a broad history of service to churches, schools, other youth groups, service clubs, community service and fraternal organizations.

Richardson started his scouting career as a Cub Scout in Kentucky in the mid-'40s. In 1949, he achieved Eagle Rank and later received a Silver Palm in East Lansing.

As an adult, he has been active with three Scout Troops, serving as an assistant scoutmaster, merit badge counselor, committee member, and Scoutmaster.

He is a graduate of Michigan State University and a doctor of veterinary medicine. He holds a master degree in surgery and medicine.

RICHARDSON HOLDS the Scoutmaster's Key, is a member of the Order of the Arrow, received the Scouter's Training Award, and participated in the 1957 Jamboree in Valley Forge, Pa.

He has served as vice president, president, and community development chairman of the Farmington Troops.

He was elected to Farmington City Council in 1969 and served as mayor pro-tem in 1973-75 and mayor in 1976.



Dr. John Richardson

Dr. Richardson is chairman of the Farmington Recreation Commission, member of the board of directors and president of the Michigan Veterinary Medical Association, president of Oakland County Veterinary Medical Association and a member of the board of directors of the YMCA since 1976.

Richardson is scoutmaster for Troop 170, Ottawa District and the director of Plaza Veterinary Hospital in Farmington.

Troop 170 includes boys who live in both Farmington and Farmington Hills.

Richardson lives with his wife Shirley and their three children. Tami, 22 and Mitti, 20, are both students at Michigan State University. Their son Mark, 17, also an Eagle Scout, is a student at Farmington High School.

Seniors stage a fashion show

The area's senior adults take the spotlight from 1-3 p.m. Monday, May 23, when they will model spring and summer fashions they've chosen from Farmington Community Center's Second Edition.

The seniors' fashion show is an annual event, given in Farmington Area Senior Center, in Mercy Center complex on 11 Mile, east of Middlebelt, through Gate 4.

It is given in cooperation with the resale boutique to help publicize the quality as well as the quantity of the clothes that come to the shop on the center's second floor and are sold for extremely low prices as a benefit for the center.

Diana Webb, a volunteer for the center and its immediate past president, will comment on the clothes as she introduces the 30 models who will show 50 complete accessorized outfits.

There is no charge.

"ALL AREA residents and especially seniors are invited," said Mary Perry, another center volunteer who heads volunteers who work in the Second Edition.

"We'll be showing a lot of exercise clothes and clothes suited for leisure-time sports as more people of all ages are wearing the casual outfits that are right for these activities," Perry said.

"But there will also be styles suitable for all occasions, and everything we show will be for sale right after the presentation."

The seniors' show will conclude with the traditional spring bridal party, which includes bridesmaids and a mother-of-the-bride.

This year's bride and bridegroom are Helen Karamon and Lou Nisile. The entire bridal party's clothing were chosen from the Second Edition's selection

of special occasion wear.

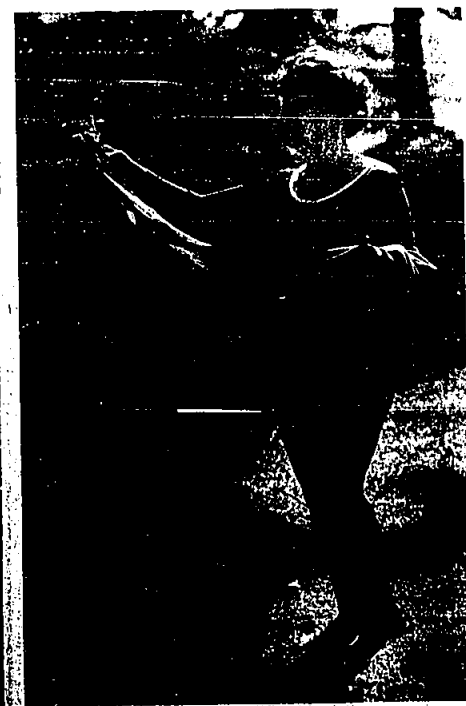
"Our experienced clothing is in constant rotation," Perry said. "There's always something new to show."

The Second Edition accepts clothing both on a donation and a consignment basis during the shop's regular hours, from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday-Friday and from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday.

days, which remain in effect through the end of May.

During June and July, shop hours are 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday-Thursday.

The shop accepts only clean and seasonal clothing. Out-of-season clothing is never accepted. The center is at 24705 Farmington Road.



The trio at left are Alex Kalosky, Stella Murphy and Al Daverio, all clad in clothes they found in Second Edition that they will model in Farmington Area Senior Adult Center Monday. Above, Helen Karamon models an exercise suit she will wear. The four are among 30 seniors who will be part of the show that is open to area residents without charge.

Summer-style nursery takes registrations

Nardin Park Community Nursery School is taking registration for nursery school "summer style." Most of the activities will be out-of-doors and centered around a different theme each week.

Typical themes will include circus week, south of the border, go Hawaiian, camping fun, and ring in the fourth.

The sessions will meet June 20-July 28, two days per week, Mondays and

Wednesdays or Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30 a.m.-12 p.m.

Since each week is self-contained, a child may attend the full six weeks or any combination of weeks.

All boys and girls, ages 3½-5½ years may attend. Tuition is \$11 per week. The nursery school is located on 11 Mile and Middlebelt at Nardin Park United Methodist Church.

Inquiries are taken by calling Mada Briggs at 478-3439.

5 to study in Germany

Five students from Our Lady of Mercy High School will be taking a study trip to Germany that is sponsored annually by the American Association of Teachers of German. The trip is supported financially by the government of West Germany, which provides a grant for each student.

The grant covers 60 percent of the cost of approximately \$1,600.

Students going this year are Leala

Mohr, Brenda Ellens, Cathy Tsamplakos, Jennifer Schmid and Beth Reutter, who received an additional scholarship of \$400.

The students will be leaving June 13 from Chicago and coming back July 13. They will be living with German families and attending classes there. This year they all will be living in the vicinity of Trier close to Luxembourg and France. Field trips also will be arranged for them.