

**Barenaked adulation**



Just like Brian Wilson did: Guitarist Ed Robertson, left, of the Canadian pop band Barenaked Ladies, signs autographs for Margaret Finkh, center, and Rena Workman after performing Tuesday at the Harmony House on Orchard Lake Road in Farmington Hills. About 2,000 fans showed, with many waiting outside just for a chance to get an autograph from band members.

**Support fuels WL chief's longevity**

For the past decade, James Geisler has had offers, but has never had the desire to move on.

"I've had people talk to me about other jobs," the Walled Lake schools superintendent said. "Nothing has been more appealing to me than staying here."

But as the 54-year-old celebrated his birthday — and 10 years with the district July 1 — he said he doesn't intend on retiring a superintendent.

"This is the longest I've ever worked anywhere in my whole career," Geisler said. "I hope I'm not a superintendent the rest of my career. You just think about the fact there are other things to do that are rewarding."

Geisler does want to stay in education, but he would like to teach at the university level.

However, he's not planning to go anywhere for at least another five years. The school board awarded Geisler a five-year contract with a 2 percent wage increase in 1998-99, raising his salary to \$130,272.

He credits the support of the board for his longevity with the district.

"My recommendations are based on what's best and I don't have to worry about whether it's going to be politically correct with the board," he said.

Geisler is pleased he's had the opportunity to oversee the hiring of most of the district's administrators and staff which he described as creative, capable people. He measures his success by the confidence he has from the board, feedback from the community, the ability to meet district goals and "the fact that the district's reputation is attractive to people who want to work here and live here."

"A lot of people negatively look at building (more schools) or the fact that we've passed some of the biggest bond issues in the history of Michigan," however, Geisler said, "You're not going to find better people in education than in the Walled Lake School District."

The only thing he would change — "I would like



**Hats off: Geisler takes a look at the football helmets for the two new middle schools.**

to see every kid in Walled Lake schools be very successful in school."

Continuing to try new teaching methods is the best way to get students excited about learning, he said.

Gerry Miller, a parent of four district children and PTA member at Commerce Elementary and Clifford Smart Middle School, said she's seen a lot of positive changes in the district since she moved to the area 16 years ago.

Miller, who has two children who have graduated, said her best opinion of the district was that it was behind the times. But curriculum changes and more teaching tools, such as new technologies, have improved educational opportunities.

"I think he's been an instigator in a lot of the things that have changed," she said. "I've been pleased with the changes."

Geisler left an assistant superintendent job at Royal Oak Schools to take on the growing school district which had 14 schools when he arrived. By this fall, the district will have 22 schools.

As the district increases by an average of 500 students annually from portions of nine communities, Geisler said, "the challenge is to maintain personal attention."

By keeping the staff-to-student ratio low and being available to all district schools, he hopes to accomplish that.

Geisler finds it ironic Steven Gaynor left the district's assistant superintendent position this month to become superintendent of Royal Oak Schools.

"I know what they need and I feel some pride in having a chance to maybe help him grow and get that job," Geisler said.

"I just learned a tremendous amount from him," Gaynor said. "It's not anything he's done overtly... it's how he conducts himself and how he conducts business. He puts in what is necessary to get the job done, while putting children first."

**CONSUMER Watch**

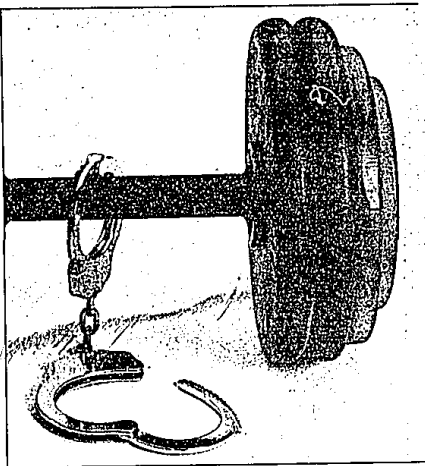
**Long-term fitness club contracts can be unhealthy trap**

By JEFF ZIMMEL

In an age when many advertisers encourage consumers to buy now and pay later, extended financing and long-term contracts can look like an attractive option. But beware: What works for cars and carpeting may not be a perfect fit when it comes to joining a health club.

The primary difference lies in the nature of the product or—to put it more accurately—in the absence of any product at all. Because when you sign on the line to join a health club, you're not actually buying a health club, but contracting to use the services of that club; services that are very often far less than many customers expected. Unfortunately, very few club contracts make any provision for cancellations, guarantees or refunds.

"No one would agree to pay an accountant or gardener or hairstylist every single month for up to 36 months, if they didn't like the results or didn't use their services. But that's exactly what most health clubs contract you to do," says Sky Holford, a 15-year veteran of the fitness industry who's managed clubs from Akron, Ohio to Anakara, Turkey. "Health clubs create contracts for their own benefit, not yours. It's not about keeping members happy. It's about keeping members when they're not happy."



**Buyer beware: Many health and fitness clubs require long-term contracts that offer no guarantee of satisfaction and no possibility of escape.**

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Sky Holford  
Fitness Consultant

According to Holford, most health clubs pump up profits by providing rate discounts to members who'll sign a long-term contract, and then argue against the prospect of having to provide long-term service to those members. "One, two or three-year contracts have a lot more to do with helping the club get more members than they do with helping club members get more results," claims Holford. "A lot of health clubs actually hope you'll get less results, get more discouraged and stop coming to the club all together. That way, there's less wear on their facilities, more room for additional members—and they still receive the revenue from your monthly dues."

At most health clubs, the biggest rate discounts are often to those members who not only agree to the longest terms, but also agree to pay the entire balance of the contract at the time of signing. Although such a concession seems fair at first glance, Holford points out that these pre-payment programs can also further a club's objective of earning the maximum amount of revenue while providing the minimum amount of service. The absence of a regular, monthly payment can make it much easier for many customers to forget they even have a membership and, therefore, make them much less likely to use the club at all.

How can you protect yourself from falling into one of these long-term traps? The best way is to ask for alternatives.

Before you sign any membership contract, ask the prospective health club for a free trial period of at least 30 days and a money-back guarantee. Ask them for a flexible membership contract that renews month-to-month and a cancellation clause you can exercise anytime. If they answer no to any of the above requests, then ask them where you can find the nearest exit.

**Limited memberships, unlimited fees**

Imagine signing up for twelve months of cellular phone service, only to discover afterwards that your new phone can't access long-distance service or can only be used on weekends. Although such a disappointing scenario is unlikely to occur with your cellular phone company, it could easily happen with your health club.

Many clubs offer basic, low-priced, limited-use memberships in order to attract new members and then court additional fees or hidden charges to make the transaction more profitable.

For instance, some clubs may feature tennis courts as part of their facility, but then require members to pay an additional monthly fee for a membership that provides access to those courts. Other clubs maximize the number of members they can serve and the amount of resulting revenue by restricting the hours during which customers with certain memberships can use their club.

company, with new clubs in north suburban Detroit, is Midwest-based Life Time Fitness.

"Our mission," says founder and president, Bahram Akradi, "is to provide an educational, entertaining, friendly and inviting, functional and innovative environment of uncompromising quality that meets the health and fitness needs of the entire family."

The company's new 95,000 sq. ft. megaclubs in Novi and Troy serve as excellent examples of how the company carries out its mission.

Every Life Time Fitness membership provides members with access to two floors of cutting-edge amenities including cardiovascular and resistance training equipment, indoor/outdoor swimming pools and waterslides, indoor rock climbing walls and caverns, basketball/volleyball courts, racquetball/squash courts, aerobics and cycling studios, an extensive free-weight center, and the company's trademarked large-screen entertainment system.

Each Life Time Fitness

**Three consumer questions that can protect you from being trapped:**

- Ask about month-to-month membership options.
- Ask about a 30-day trial period with a money-back guarantee.
- Ask about membership restrictions and extra charges for items such as towels and lockers.

But the most common means by which many health clubs offset the loss of lower priced memberships is by charging all of their members an additional fee for the use of such basics as towels, lockers or childcare centers.

Of course, the simplest way for any health club member to get the most out of any membership is to find out exactly what that membership does and does not include before they become a member. Does the proposed membership allow you to use all the facilities, all the time? Does the prospective club charge extra for aerobic classes, childcare services, lockers or towels? As always, it's best to look before you leap and read before you sign.

**Healthy alternatives**

Although the policies and practices outlined above may be unfamiliar, they are by no means uncommon. In fact, most of them have been used for so long, by so many health clubs, that they're often accepted as the industry standard. Fortunately, a few forward-thinking fitness companies are changing the way things work by changing the way they work with their members. One such

membership also entitles members to free childcare services, free educational seminars, free locker and towel service and free aerobic instruction.

Most importantly, the company offers a unique month-to-month membership program with no long-term contract.

"Most companies with long-term contracts don't have any confidence in their product," claims Akradi. "At Life Time Fitness, quality is our contract. We make sure every employee will make every visit a pleasure and earn your business every day."

The company is so confident in its customer service that they also offer a 30-day money-back guarantee so members can fully experience their sports and fitness centers and ensure complete satisfaction.

For information regarding your rights as a consumer and the ways in which you can protect yourself, contact the Better Business Bureau of Greater Detroit at (248) 644-9100 or the Office of the Michigan Attorney General at (313) 258-2519.

For more information regarding the new Life Time Fitness clubs of Troy and Novi, call (248) 267-1000.

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