

# Sweating to the gospel

## Local churches help members get fit spiritually and physically

By DAMON FORD  
THE CHRONICLE

Gospel music has always been music that stirs the soul but at several local churches, it's also the beat that makes you break a sweat.

And - hopefully - shed a few pounds.

Just push back a few chairs and tables in the fellowship hall, pop in a Fred Hammond or Kirk Franklin CD and get ready to rock with gospel aerobics.

"I've lost about 10 pounds already," said Robin Woods. (Exercise) builds up my self-esteem because I was feeling down about my weight."

The Greensboro resident has been working out at Power House of Deliverance Garden Cathedral a few days a week since last October.

Woods was sold on the new trend from day one. The friendly confines of the Lord's house, featuring music by Trin-I-Tee 5:7 or Anointed beats a strange gym and the rap lyrics of Mace or Outkast any day, she says.

"Sometimes if you come in feeling down they'll stop and we'll have prayer," Woods said. "You can't get that at Gold's Gym!"

Walter Jones, owner and operator of WalJo Christian Music Aerobics and Fitness teaches five days a week at the church and says for a long time people have been unwilling to go to the gym to work out.

Then there are the folks who are so concerned about taking care of their spiritual life, they begin to neglect their bodies. He decided to get into fitness training in an effort to merge the spiritual and physical.

"The majority of black people won't go to the gym," Jones said. "We rather eat whatever we want

and lay down and be tired than get up and just walk. We've got to understand that we have to take care of our body."

With the help of Marcy Deloatch, Jones, who recorded a gospel aerobics video, started offering the classes last April. Deloatch only teaches on Saturday mornings but has been a fitness buff for years.

"A lot of women are self-conscious about going to the gym," Deloatch said. "The music is sexually explicit sometimes and that turns them off too."

The 36-year-old mother and in-home child care provider once weighed 269 pounds and now tips the scale at a svelte 139. She works out on her own or with friends five days a week while maintaining a strict diet to keep the pounds off.

"Our body is the temple of God and we've got to be good ourselves," Deloatch said. "(God) gave us one body. If you don't take care of it, he won't give us another one."

With the instruction of teachers like Deloatch and Jones, Woods has gotten the support and encouragement to become physically and spiritually stronger.

"(Marcy) is great," Woods said. "She inspired me by telling me how much weight she lost. (Walter) helps us too. He's really good. If you miss two or three classes he'll get on you. (The class) is like a family. They'll work with you until you build up your stamina."

But Power House isn't the only church that offers lessons in fitness.

\*For the last year, Cleveland Avenue Christian Church in Winston-Salem has offered aerobics classes.

The Rev. Sheldon McCarter didn't bat an eye when he was

approached by members of his congregation who wanted to get a class started.

"As a matter of fact we were very glad to do it," he said.

The East Winston church holds two classes on week nights for women and one on Saturday mornings for men.

McCarter is not only a believer in the new trend in his church - on occasion, he's been known to trade in his robe for a pair of sweats and tennis shoes.

"It's Scriptural," he said. "The bible says that 'Beloved, I wish above all things that mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth. The Lord wants you to be well in health too (3 John 1:2)."

Carolynn Berry, a professor of exercise science and physiology at Winston-Salem State University, says it's great that churches are looking to improve the health of their members as well as their spirits.

"I think (churches) can do a tremendous amount to change the health conscientiousness of people," she said. "I applaud these people that are going in this direction."

Berry, a member of International Society for Hypertension in Blacks, says exercise combined with a healthy diet, rich in fruits and vegetables and low in fat, can help prevent or control a host of diseases that affect prevent or control problematic health conditions in blacks such as hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and obesity.

But aerobics aren't the only way church members can get in shape.

"You can put on music and walk around the church sanctuary and enjoy fellowship with others," Berry said. "(Exercising) doesn't



Photo by Damon Ford

Marcy Deloatch is one of the aerobics instructors at Power House of Deliverance Garden Cathedral which offers fitness training to its members.

have to be this painful thing."

Walking or low-impact aerobics are usually a safe bet for most people, especially for those who are overweight. But she advises that anyone beginning any sort of exercise program should check with their doctor before they start. Getting a doctor's OK can be the difference between getting in shape or getting injured.

"You always want to start slowly," Berry said. "You don't want to start off hard and hurt yourself."

Deloatch, who teaches low impact aerobics, tried to take it slow with her new class at Triad Church of Christ in Greensboro last weekend but her students had other ideas.

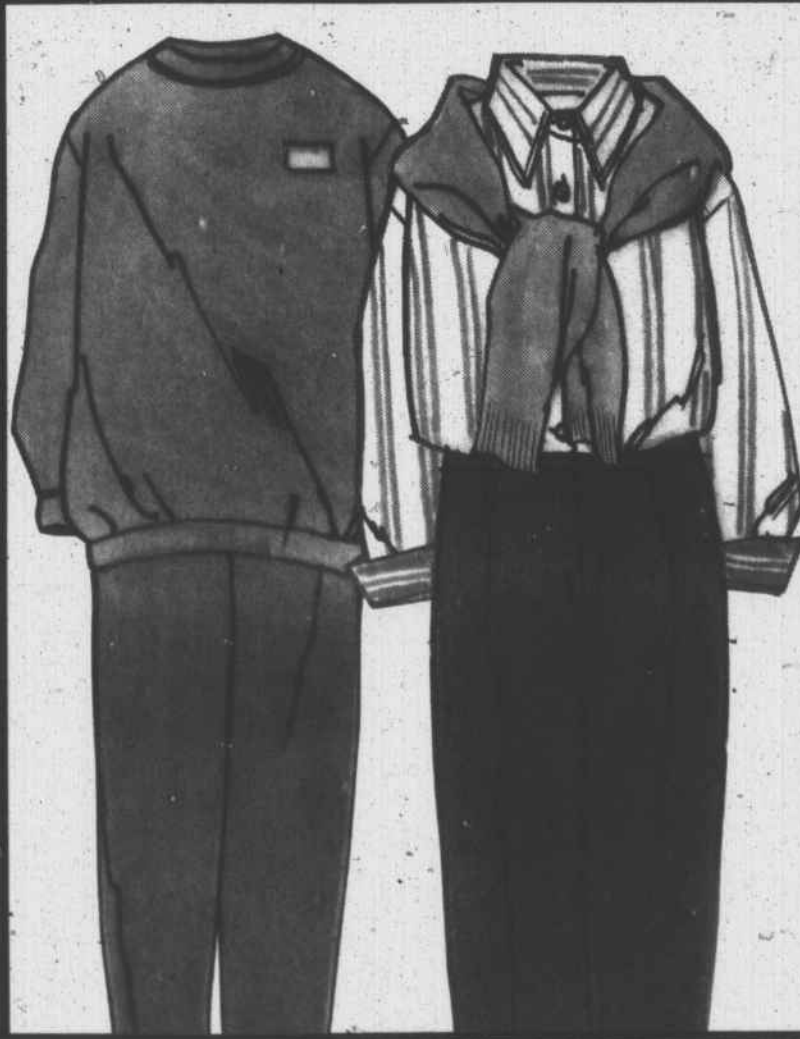
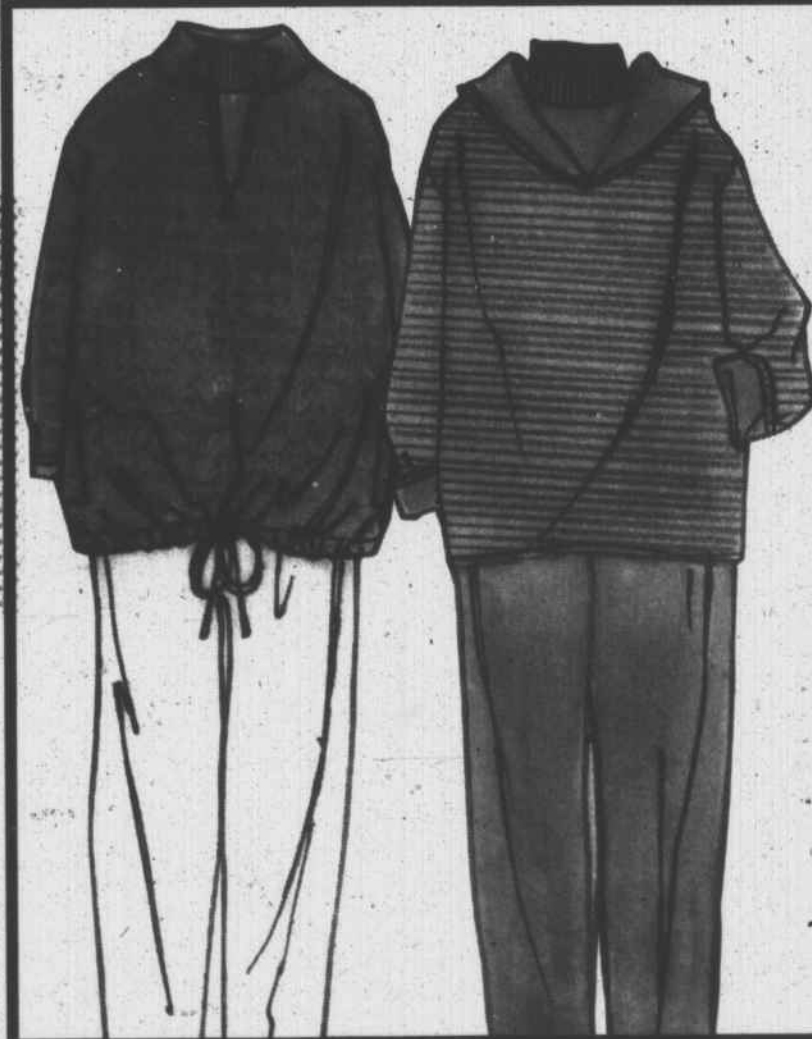
"They had so much fun," Deloatch said. "They were so pumped and so hyper over what I'm doing. We were elbow to elbow but we worked it out. We had a good time."

"I hope every church starts (a program)."



# DESIGNER CLEARANCE

America's #1 Designer, Favorite American Designer & Chaus Sport



**SAVE 25-50%**  
Orig. \$28-\$130 Now \$14-\$97<sup>50</sup>  
America's #1 Designer  
Sport & Co.

Tunics, skirts, pants, tops, blouses and jackets, in polar fleece and other fabrics. Various styles, colors, sizes 4-16, s-m-l-xl.

**SAVE 25-50%**  
Orig. \$39-\$175 Now \$29<sup>25</sup>-131<sup>25</sup>  
Favorite American Designer

Tops and bottoms from the "Windsor" and "Covenant Garden" groups to wear now. Sizes 4-16, s-m-l-xl.

**SAVE 25-50%**  
Orig. \$34-\$58 Now \$17-\$39  
Chaus Sport

Velour and knit tunics & pull-on pants, in assorted colors. Missy s-xl, petites' p-1 and women's 1-3X.

# Dillard's

Casual Sportswear