

Going with the slow

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Body Lab's workouts go with the slow

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Jenny Cushing is the first to admit the strategy on which her successful fitness studio is based doesn't make sense. At first, anyway.

But the co-owner of The Body Lab has made believers in the signature method that bucks the idea that moving more rapidly equals better results.

Rather than the typical heart-racing movements distinctive of traditional cardiovascular routines, The Body Lab uses the Lagree Fitness Method to push people to their limits with slow, targeted movements.

"It's counterintuitive," said Cushing, who founded The Body Lab in Phoenix in 2010 with partner Rachel Forman. "The brain is conditioned to think that faster makes the workout harder. But going slower pushes you further than higher-intensity workouts. That's how you affect the muscle and affect change."

The workout is designed to combine Pilates, cardio and strength training to take the body to its limits. The workout burns 600 calories in a 50-minute class, Cushing said of the Pilates-but-not-Pilates program.

The low-impact nature makes it age-friendly and versatile for any body type or fitness level, Cushing said. But don't mistake that for an easy, breezy walk in the park.

"Everyone says, 'It's the hardest workout I've ever done.' But it's low impact, so any age can do it by making modifications," Cushing says of the more than 1,000 moves that can be adjusted to anyone's physical ability or limitation.

When Cushing and Forman moved to Phoenix from Los Angeles, where they discovered the workout created by Sebastien Lagree, no one offered it. In 2012, two years after opening their first location in Arcadia, Cushing and Forman opened their second, at Desert Ridge Marketplace. A third Valley location is slated to open in 2019. The partners also opened a Body Lab in Leawood, Kansas, about 16 miles south of Kansas City.

Today, their Phoenix studios have more than 1,000 members, Cushing



Trainer Adam Maielua teaches a hardcore Pilates class at The Body Lab in Phoenix. PHOTOS BY CHERYL EVANS/THE REPUBLIC



Ivy Ciolli takes a class using the Lagree Method at a Body Lab location. High-profile names like Meghan Markle and Nicole Kidman use the method.

said. Monthly membership prices range from \$139 for eight classes to \$239 for unlimited classes. A single session is \$30, and session packs range up to \$995 for 50 sessions.

Cushing said the company has had 3 to 5 percent annual growth. It's part of a global health club, gym and studio industry that generated \$87.2 billion in 2017, according to the International

Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association.

Diverse clientele

Classes are taught with high-energy music that partners with the more active rendition of traditional Pilates. Most members range in age from mid-20s to 60s, Cushing said. She's had

a participant as young as 17, who was training for a pro-ice-skating career, and one who was 80.

Motivations for Cushing's clientele are as diverse as the clientele itself. Some are training for a specific event or goal; others are tired of their usual fitness routine and seeking variation. Some come for therapeutic reasons.

"The workout is core-focused," Cushing said. "With most injuries, the healing process starts with getting your core back."

Mike O'Malley recalled walking by The Body Lab en route to a neighboring grocery store years ago. A workout enthusiast, out of curiosity, he'd look into the studio while a class was going on.

"That looks supereasy," O'Malley said of his impression at the time. "Then I went to a class. (I thought,) 'Wow, this is hard.'"

O'Malley, an Arcadia resident, joined The Body Lab in 2014 and attends three or four sessions each week. He's noticed a change in his abs, overall core and legs, which he said have become a lot stronger and significantly more defined.

"You're on this weird device. ... You must use your strength to move the device, but you always have to use balance. You don't usually have to use balance in a workout," he said. "You feel great when you're done. Like a runner's high."

O'Malley also likes the camaraderie and friendly vibe of his classmates.

"We're social, we all know each other and communicate," he said. "All the teachers are very personable and friendly and correct you if you're doing something wrong, but in a nice and supportive way."

Craving non-traditional workouts

Cushing, a commercial real estate professional, was living in Los Angeles when she discovered the Lagree Method in 2007. She craved a non-traditional yet challenging workout. She read about celebrities like Nicole Kidman and Jennifer Aniston doing it, which piqued her interest.

"If it's good enough for them, why would it not be good enough for me?" she said. "I gave it a shot. I was hooked

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Trainer Adam Maielua leads a Lagree class. The method pushes people to their limits with slow, targeted movements. CHERYL EVANS/THE REPUBLIC

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the first time.”

When she moved to the Valley, she was frustrated with the workout not being available. She and Forman believed Phoenix and Scottsdale were just as health- and celebrity-conscious as Los Angeles and that it would do just as well here.

They took a leap of faith and opened one of the first Lagree Fitness-focused studios outside California.

Now, there are more than 600 inter-

national locations offering the routine done by high-profile names like Meghan Markle, the Kardashians and Victoria's Secret models.

Witnessing the positive change in clients' bodies, energy levels and even how they carry themselves over time is something Cushing treasures. She has seen people hold their heads high when they hadn't before.

“There's no more joy than seeing the transformation of a person becoming the physically best they can become,” she said. “Seeing them believe in themselves and invest in themselves, it's very gratifying to be part of that process.”