**Feature Stories**

Connor Quinn

**Exercising at Home During COVID-19**

 The outbreak of COVID-19 has forced the temporary closure of many businesses that are often taken for granted in society. These include restaurants, retail shops and of course, gyms.

 Gyms have long provided a place people go to better themselves physically. They also provide a release from day-to-day life. Many would even call them essential businesses.

 However, gyms also provide easy transmission of viruses, including COVID-19. This caused many gyms to temporarily close their doors to the public, leaving people to their own devices to find a means of exercise.

 This led to an influx of people buying and searching for exercise equipment. Whether it was free weights like dumbbells and barbells or exercise machines like rowers and stationary bikes, the market saw a sharp increase in the demand for these products.

 According to Research and Markets, fitness equipment sales grew 170 percent during the lockdowns. With this unforeseen and massive increase in demand and sales, the supply from retailers and manufacturers could not keep up with the demand.

This led many retailers to sell out of popular equipment. Rogue Fitness, a popular online retailer for exercise equipment sold out of dumbbells, kettlebells and many other products.

 Similar sights could be seen on the shelves of retailers able to remain open such as Academy Sports + Outdoors and Dick’s Sporting Goods.

 When gyms and closed and equipment scarce, what can people do to exercise? Well, many fitness experts and enthusiasts agree. You go back to the basics.

 While gyms have a wide variety of equipment allowing people to work out, stay-at-home exercise has proven that a great workout can be achieved with few resources.

 Emmalea Gomberg, a fitness instructor in Houston, who has taught a variety of classes including Pure Barre, says that equipment is not absolutely necessary for fitness.

 When asked about what individuals can do at home, Gomberg said, “I would say any type of bodyweight fitness routine because you can still get a good workout and build muscle without equipment. Even then, there is stuff you can use at home (for equipment).”

 Gomberg also began offering her classes online via Zoom, an option utilized by many gyms and personal trainers across the country.

 These online sessions not only allowed Gomberg and others to continue to do their jobs but also allowed them the opportunity to share with others how to exercise with little to no equipment.

 Another who shares Gomberg’s opinion is Brett Robinson, a former contestant on CBS’s “Big Brother” who is also a sponsored fitness athlete and social media influencer. While his life has taken him to gyms around the country, he still believes in the importance of working out with little to no equipment.

“I just work with what I got. I try to find somewhere I can do pullups so I can hit full body. I run, do burpees, pullups, pushups and squats. Hits every muscle group,” said Robinson.

 It seems the U.S. Military has been onto something for decades. The old-school method of running and calisthenics produces results without the need for expensive equipment.

 The U.S. Military has long pushed a fitness program focusing on pushups, pullups, situps and running. These exercises have persisted through the years for a reason. They work and can be done almost anywhere.

 Many people used to working out were forced to return to the basics. This led to a trend of fitness enthusiasts on social media sharing home workouts. One of these was Houston resident, Jose Noguera.

 Noguera, who normally visits The GYM, located in the River Oaks Shopping Center, started showcasing his garage workouts via Instagram.

 Noguera, who normally focuses on strength-related workouts, began doing CrossFit style workouts which helped his endurance as well as strength.

 Viewers of Noguera’s Instagram stories could view him performing different compound exercises popular in CrossFit with little to no equipment.

 The temporary pause from his normal routine, also gave Noguera an opportunity to learn new exercises he could then incorporate into his gym workouts.

 Another Houston resident who took the time to change things up from his normal exercise regime was Quinn Haynie, a regular at 24 Hour Fitness in the Galleria area.

 Haynie, like Noguera, is used to high-weight strength-based workouts began running during his time away from the gym.

 While it was a big change at first, the change allowed him to build up his cardiovascular endurance and focus on a different aspect of fitness.

 Whether it be focusing on a new area of fitness or maintaining one’s current level, both can be achieved at home with little to no equipment.

 Longtime fitness enthusiasts know about the law of diminishing returns and how it applies to fitness. When one does the same thing over and over again, the results become less and less.

 With that in mind, the lockdowns due to COVID-19, at least when it came to those who exercise, became less of an inconvenience and more of an opportunity.

 While many may have let their exercise routines lapse during the shutdowns, this was not the case for the majority of people.

 According to an online survey conducted by Statista, 53 percent of people felt their exercise habits did not change during the pandemic versus only 27 percent of people stating that they worked out less than usual.

On top of that, even 17 percent of people replied that they worked out more often during this same time period. Whether this change is due to more time being spent at home or a desire to try something new during this time, whatever gets people up and moving is a good thing.

 When people’s lives are slowed to a standstill, an aspect of normalcy is important including one’s health. Many people have been exercising at home for a long time but for some, this was a new concept.

Fortunately, resources for homebound fitness are plentiful and show that one does not need expensive equipment and memberships to get in shape and stay in shape. All one needs is a little bit of know-how and some space.

Connor Quinn

**Hawaii’s Own Son**

 John Alexander Florence starts his days like most people. He wakes up early, he has some coffee and he makes himself breakfast. It’s what he does after breakfast that differentiates this 27-year-old from the majority of the population.

 After breakfast, on a warm, Hawaiian, winter day, he walks out his back door, goes down a short flight of stairs, makes his way across a slim stretch of light golden sand and then paddles his North Shore Shapers board out to Pipeline, the most famous surf break in Hawaii and possibly the world. This is when John becomes John John.

 John John Florence did not stumble across the north shore of Oahu or make his pilgrimage here as so many surfers dream of doing; he did not have to. He was born here.

 Well, maybe he did stumble across it. After all, his being born there was only slightly more than chance. In 1986, 16-year-old Alexandra Florence (now known as Mom John) decided it was time to leave her East Coast upbringing. She simply asked her parents if they didn’t mind driving her to La Guardia where she boarded a flight to Honolulu, hitchhiked from the airport to Haleiwa, and only hours after stepping off the plane, was asked if she wanted to be in a movie called *North Shore*. Six years later, John was born.

Growing up on the north shore of Oahu placed John John in the best place in the world to hone his craft. It is as if he was destined to become a professional surfer and to be called “one of the most dominant Pipe surfers of his era” by Surfer Magazine.

But when he competes in the Volcom Pipe Pro, which he has won four times, it is more than just a contest. It’s a homecoming.

When not surfing the Banzai Pipeline, one can find John John anywhere from the Mainland to Australia to Namibia to Brazil, surfing the greatest waves the world has to offer.

Despite traveling the world, winning contest after contest, one title has escaped him. He has won the Volcom Pipe Pro four times but as those in the competitive surfing world know, the Pipe Pro is the little brother to another event held in the same location: Billabong Pipe Masters.

Pipe Masters is to surfing what the regular Masters is to golf. It is more than just a contest. It is, as Jim Nantz would say, “A tradition unlike any other.”

Will this be the year that John John gets to hold up the Pipe Masters trophy and then place it on a shelf in his home just a few yards away?

He seems to think so. “I feel great going into the summer before the start of next season. I was working off an injury the last two years but I feel strong and healthy. I have also been working with my shaper and testing out new boards, trying to create the perfect Pipe board and I think we’ve done it.”

Only time will tell if the waves will line up like stars and bring victory to Hawaii’s own son, John John Florence.