

# WHEEL

HEALTH AND WELLNESS ISSUE

# Swing Cash

• McKeesport Native

WNBA All-Star ☆

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# Walk Solid

## I WANT TO WALK WITH YOU

BY BECCA CIPRIANI / PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY LESLIE SANSONE

New Castle native Leslie Sansone, the face and force behind the nationally successful "In-Home Walking" video program, got her start in fitness in 1979, thanks to her cousin, Carlow College, and a coffee can.

### THE CONVERSION

"I was in school for architectural engineering," Sansone remembers, "and my cousin, who was attending Carlow, read about a weekend course for aerobics instructors there. I wasn't a cheerleader or anything athletic, but I tried it and was struck by feeling so good after all that movement and music."

Sansone wanted everyone to experience that fitness rush, so she started teaching at random church halls, just showing up with a boom box and a Maxwell House coffee can. "People would throw dollars into the can — sometimes, I made \$100 for teaching aerobics. My mom's reaction was, 'What did you do for this money?'"

Her aerobics classes helped pay for her college education, but eventually engineering took a cool down while teaching fitness warmed up. Sansone was hooked on "spreading the news of good health" and was passionate about motivating those who normally weren't interested in fitness. "A lot of folks are turned off by aerobics — dancing and jumping around in outfits," she explains.

With that thought in mind, she was driving to work at Club Fitness (now Studio Fitness) in New Castle one day in late fall of 1985. Noticing the people walking in the neighborhood, she absently wondered what outdoor walkers did for exercise in the winter. *Hmm, she thought, walking is a physical activity anyone would try. They could come to the club ... but we only have a few treadmills, and no indoor track.*

And then, a stroke of simple ingenuity: Why not have a walk-aerobics class?

"I put an ad in the paper the next day [for the new class]," Sansone recalls. "And 75 people showed up for it. Soon, we had over 40 walk-aerobics classes a week."

But how did the video empire begin? "I never thought I'd be doing videos," Sansone confesses, but Fate took the first step for her. "One of the [walk-aerobics class] ladies was going on vacation and didn't want to miss a class. So she asked if she could film it."

Sansone was fine with the filming but chose the services of a wedding videographer friend to

capture the class on film. But the vacationing woman wasn't the only one eager for the video. "Everyone wanted a copy to take home," Sansone says, which got her to thinking. "We have to do more of this. So walk-aerobics turned into 'In-Home Walking.'"

#### FITNESS EVANGELIST

Still a passionate advocate of exercise for all, Sansone works to educate consumers on fitness that fits their lifestyle. "I worry about research that says you need 60 minutes of strenuous exercise a day. How can anyone squeeze that in? If people would walk for 10 minutes for lunch every day, they'd notice a difference. Just the emotional and mental improvement is huge."

Sansone battles the intimidation of science's suggestions and health club atmospheres (the cost, the clothes, the comparisons). "Most people want to be more active and fit but feel funny joining a club."

Her In-Home Walking program is for them: "It's in the privacy of your own home and all you have to do is walk. You can build up your confidence at home, then try other [fitness] opportunities. But [fitness] has got to be part of your lifestyle."

Her pep talk closes: "Forget what intimidates. Just add one little something — a brisk walk up and down the hall or around the parking lot. It makes a big impact."

And what keeps the nationally known fitness guru from walking out of New Castle? "I travel the world, but love coming home. A lot of people can relocate, but I think of my roots and the reasons I love this area. I'll never get over Western PA." ☺

#### SANSONE'S GAME IS AFOOT

If you're interested in walking to get in shape, try some of Sansone's offerings this year:

- o 70 different walk programs on video
- o All-new [lesliesanson.com](http://lesliesanson.com) website, home of Walk Diet and Leslie Sansone Online Walking Club and all Leslie Sansone products
- o Walkers World of Fitness ("It's a walker's paradise," says Sansone) featuring classes, treadmills, connected indoor/outdoor walking track and more for all ages (opening before year's end)
- o In-Home Walking self-powered treadmill (offered through April on QVC)
- o "Kids Walk" video ("This is an alternative to [sedentary living]," Sansone says, "to halt diabetes and obesity in kids.")

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