

Mancuso's Truckee gym inspires weekend warriors

By Susan Wood

TRUCKEE – The roots of Olympic ski racing medalist Julia Mancuso run vast and deep in Truckee – much like the downhill runs she conquers.

A resident of Olympic Valley, Julia needs no last name for people in the Lake Tahoe region to know whom one is talking about.

At the JM Performance Training Center, this 6,000 square-foot facility is where recreation and racing meet style and sex appeal. Mancuso is known for mixing the fast and the feminine. Mancuso took over ownership of this Truckee fitness facility a year ago. The Pioneer Trail Drive gym brings a unique flair to conditioning.



Olympian Julia Mancuso trains at the gym she owns in Truckee when she is in town. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Seven years after launching her career in a major way at the World Cup on Copper Mountain in Colorado, Mancuso won a gold

medal in the 2006 Winter Games in Turin, Italy. Then she turned around and captured two silvers in the combined and downhill events in 2010 at the Vancouver Games in Whistler. It's been a hard-fought road in the shadows of her U.S. Women's Ski Team mate Lindsey Vonn. Despite the friendly competition, Mancuso placed fourth overall in the nation's women ski racing program last year.

But it's not only her fierce performances on the slopes that make Mancuso so memorable. Her personality comes out in all her endeavors.

At the front desk, her gym sells pink sweat shirts for \$20 with a caricature readily known as the ski racer. A big, bold photograph of her carving a perfect slalom turn hangs near the front entrance. A panoramic photo of where she skis, Squaw Valley, takes up the high side of an entire back wall of the gym.

No plans have been made for expanding the gym's retail outlet to include Mancuso's "Kiss My Tiara" line of lingerie, but gym worker Andrew Finkelstein didn't rule out the idea either when he gave *Lake Tahoe News* a recent tour. The tiara line was inspired by her coach presenting her with a royal tiara for luck in 2005. Five years later, she wore it during the medal ceremonies at Whistler.

Mancuso's stamp on the gym has carried over to the grounds and the clientele of 800 members.



Vivian Herrera was drawn to the gym because of Mancuso.

“I’m a snowboarder, so when I moved here from Chile, I wanted this gym because of her experience with skiing. I’ve been athletic my entire life,” said Vivian Herrera, who moved to Truckee five months ago. She works at the Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe spa. She usually hits the treadmill, free weights and the TRX suspension training classes. A popular new training mechanism, TRX works on one’s body core through suspended stretching bands in various positions.

“The people are friendly here, and they offer special training classes that keep you fit,” Herrera added.

These principles are what Mancuso had in mind when she opened her gym more than a year ago.

“Being active and fit is a part of my DNA. I live for it. It was only natural to take the opportunity when it came up,” Mancuso told *Lake Tahoe News*. The star athlete is learning one day at a time about the business side. “But at the end of the day, I know I am giving a place to the community to come and play and have fun and feel really good.”

Mancuso’s father, Ciro, owns the land and the building, which has stood for 12 years under a different name.

The ski racer also relies on a competent team that helps the

customers by “inspiring them to reach their goals.” If that’s not enough to hammer home the mission of the gym, the signs in the group exercise room remind others who aspire to be the best like Mancuso to place the end result in sight. They say: “Follow Your Dreams” and “Commit to be Fit.”

The hallway leading to the women’s locker room also serves as a reminder to working hard at fitness, at least for the prospective Olympian in all of us. The hall is lined with posters of the Olympic Games, a touch sure to instill pride and chills in even the most cynical.

The local Olympian would like to see another bid for the Winter Games in Tahoe. A high-powered committee is working on the 2026 Games.

“I attribute 100 percent of my success as an Olympic ski racer to the mountains and growing up in Squaw Valley,” she said, admitting, though, she hasn’t skied many other places in Tahoe to compare where the women’s downhill run should be located.

Squaw named a run after her called Julia’s Gold.

“Although the run on KT is steep and short, it’s a ton of fun. There is really nothing like skiing in my hometown,” she said.

The vibrant 28-year-old Mancuso, who was born in Reno, tries to return to Tahoe for a few weeks to train each year, although much of her life is on the road.



Andrew Finkelstein demonstrates how the Olympic setup works.

Still, her gym lives on without her physical presence. And a spike in membership when she took over the operation showed the power of the image mixed with a little elbow grease. The staff took out the tanning beds from the previous gym and focused entirely on a well-rounded fitness approach that members would embrace.

“We tried something a little more modern, and we tried to make it fun,” Finkelstein said, while walking around the front room.

Sure, there are many features one would find in a lot of fitness centers – 25 nautilus weight machines, a dozen cardio units, 15 free weights stations, dumbbells, kettlebells, jump ropes and plyometric accessories. It’s the assortment mixed in with a wall of pull-up bars and stretching devices that make it stand out. Plus, one free weight corner is labeled the “Olympic setup.”

“This is a little corner event in itself,” Finkelstein said. He picked up the long weight bar, transporting an observer to the Summer Olympics.

Moreover, how many gyms can attract the Squaw Valley ski team in their spin rooms?

The TRX suspension classes often sell out, and the others such as “Cardio kickboxing,” “Bosu strength and stability” and “Summer hardbodies” stay busy, according to Finkelstein.

Sometimes the workouts go outside – with esteemed general manager and triathlete Chris Cloyd taking the members out for a run in the center after their workouts.

“We work pretty hard keeping our members happy,” Finkelstein said. And then there’s Mancuso, who commended her staff for their efforts.

Sometimes Mancuso and the gym members think alike.

Mancuso said she plans to work on an approach for reducing injuries in her training in the upcoming year. This is also the goal of longtime gym member Keith Abrahms, who has come to the gym since its inception.

“It’s the only thing that keeps me vertical,” he said, while working on his biceps. The carpenter strives to keep his core intact to keep him out of medical clinics.

The Performance Training Center offers a standard annual membership for \$50 a month.