



Richmond Balance's boot camp

O'Dark Thirty

Early-morning boot camps forge friendships

→ *By Ryan Marr / Photography by Sarah Walor*

It's 6 a.m. on a rainy Friday, and the members of Richmond Balance's boot-camp workout group are in the midst of their third set of lunges on the steps at Libby Terrace in Church Hill.

"You want to know what the key to the universe is?" shouts personal trainer Kim Dyer, bending down on one knee to demonstrate the proper lunge technique. "It isn't locked. If you can believe it, you can do it."

To many Richmond-area residents, such fitness programs are more than just a means to cutting minutes off a 5K time, trimming excess body fat or building muscle tone. Besides offering a structured, balanced approach to total fitness, boot camps also tap into a collective mentality that promotes social

networking and friendship.

"We're dedicated to each other," says 45-year-old Bill Dinkin, a mixture of sweat and rain dripping off his forehead. "If I get up in the morning and don't have that feeling like I want to come in, I know that everyone's going to be out here, expecting me to show up, too."

The wide range of fitness levels on display in boot camps adds to a sense of teamwork among the participants, who feed off each other's encouragement to finish the more demanding exercises.

In fact, this endorphin-fueled camaraderie often stretches beyond the limits of the fitness program and into the social lives of the participants.