

# Positive Motion

Movement with a Message

Patrick and Positive Motion

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## Groovy program gets kids off the couch

*Mila Koumpilova*

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**Patrick Kasper believes it might take a pinch of slyness to get teenagers moving.**

**Banish telltale words such as “exercise” or “fitness.” Ditch the bright-colored leotards and the uptight drill instructor attitude. Instead of sit-ups and pushups, serve up goofy moves with names such as “shakie-shakie-boom-shakie-shakie-bam.”**

**Kasper, a former aerobics instructor and choreographer, blended his fitness and dance credentials to create Positive Motion, a workout program he’s pitching to unsuspecting area students. He knows from experience teens are loath to quit their sedentary, junk-food-eating ways – unless he can deftly sell them on a fun alternative.**

**“They might be sweating by the end, but they’re like, ‘Oh, we exercised? I didn’t notice that,’ ” he says about his stealthy approach.**

**Earlier this month, Kasper set out to convert the 40-some-member cast of Moorhead’s Horizon Middle School musical “Once on This Island.” “We’ll just move and groove to a little warm-up action,” he told them reassuringly when they met up at the Moorhead High School auditorium.**

**Relentlessly energetic at 9 a.m. on a Friday, he led them through a few moves – more laid-back dance steps than Pilates. They pieced them together in a hip-hop-flavored routine. He split the group in two opposing teams. “It’s the dance-off of the century,” he yelled. “Are we ready?”**

**“I was impressed with how he had all 46 kids focused,” says Kelly Gerchak, the show’s director. “That’s a lot of middle schoolers.”**

**Kasper came up with Positive Motion in the 1990s, when he worked as an aerobics instructor and Reebok rep in Chicago. He loved working out with children, but until now**

Positive Motion was always a side project. Last month, he traded his gig as a DJ with Radio Fargo-Moorhead for a part-time job with the company so he could focus on the fitness program.

**His philosophy:** Keep things casual and relaxed, and count on the post-workout endorphin rush to bring kids back for more. Soon, he hopes to start sharing his personal story – an inveterate couch potato who dreaded shopping for “husky” jeans at the mall discovers the joy of movement. As this veteran of Eddie and Kathy Kasper’s dance school likes to say, “If a tubby kid from North Dakota can end up teaching aerobics in Paris and the Cayman Islands, anything is possible.”

Charli Hesteness, an eighth-grader who sampled Kasper’s workout at Moorhead High, says to many of her peers, exercising is a chore parents and teachers push a bit too zealously.

“There are so many video games; there are so many stores to go to,” says Hesteness. “Exercise is like homework. You don’t do it until you have to.”

But, says sixth-grader April Johnson, Kasper’s dance workout and his high-energy personality changed their minds: “He was really fun and free-spirited. He didn’t force it out of us, like, ‘You have to do this exactly.’ ”

Gerchak, who coached junior high and high school volleyball and basketball for 20 years, says mostly students in organized sports exercise regularly. That leaves two-thirds of students who could use the exposure, she says.

“We have so many kids whose recreation is going to the mall,” Gerchak says. “It’s pretty frightening being a classroom teacher and seeing the obesity.”

But how to reach those reluctant fitness-buffs-in-waiting? This summer, Kasper, a Trollwood alum, will teach Positive Motion classes at the arts school. He aims to make more visits to area public schools and enlist sprightly teen ambassadors to spread the word after he leaves. He plans to apply for state funding.

Kasper also offers Positive Motion to businesses as an employee motivation tool, but vows students will stay a priority: “If we can get corporate America to pay for this, then we won’t have to ask anyone for money.”

At the end of last year, Kasper recruited a bunch of local teens to star in a Positive Motion video. The formula: no impossibly buff fitness instructor in skin-tight outfit plugging through countless repetitions. Says Kasper, “For us, it’s more about throwing on a T-shirt and just moving and grooving.”

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