

Optometrist seeks 'elite fitness'

Dr. Chuck McDonald has a passion for fitness.

It was that passion which, in the closing days of July, carried him across the country to enter the famed CrossFit Games, perhaps the ultimate fitness competition.

The 56-year-old Easton optometrist returned home still ranked in the top 20 in fitness. For people of his age, in the international world of CrossFit .

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McDonald is one of three owners of the eight-store Accurate Optical network on Delmarva, and although he is now involved in a search for elite fitness, it was not always so.

McDonald arrived in Easton from Washington D.C., via Tennessee in 1986. He was not, by any account, in what might be defined as "good shape."

He was overweight. He had nagging lower back and neck pain. Both discomforts were being aggravated by golf and physical exercise such as wood splitting.

"This had been going on, in varying degrees, for 10 years," Dr. Cianci said. "Chuck related some of his discomfort to an auto accident about 10 years earlier and added that he just never felt 'quite right' after that."

Dr. Cianci did a thorough examination and took X-rays. "He appeared to be an ideal candidate for chiropractic care," he said.

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Dr. Cianci's chiropractic attentions composed the first step in McDonald's path to fitness.

The next critical step occurred when his wife, Easton dentist Dr. Margie Quimby arrived home from a workout at CrossFit in Easton.

He remembers that she was sweating, her hair wet from perspiration and he realized, he said, that what he was doing in the way of workout at another Easton facility



The Cianci Chronicles

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(Authored by Bruce Hotchkiss)

was over a much lower bar.

"I wasn't even breaking a sweat," McDonald said, "I was overweight, got tired just going up the steps and even had trouble putting on my shoes."

McDonald signed up for CrossFit and immersed himself in its unique culture.

CrossFit offers what it describes as a core strength and conditioning program to "forge elite fitness." It preaches, "We don't use machines, we build them."

Workouts are fashioned around pushups, pull-ups, jump ropes, Olympic lifts and functional movements such as timed jumping on and off boxes of various heights.

But workouts are only a part of the McDonald fitness package. The other key elements are massage, careful attention to diet and regularly scheduled fine-tuning by Dr. Cianci. "Chuck is now living healthy," Cianci said.

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The CrossFit Games were held in California July. McDonald competed in the age-50-55 Masters Group. The Masters is one of four age groups in the three-day competition.

In preparation for the games,

he went into six weeks of intense training.

It was his first time at the games. "I'm excited, of course," he said, during his training. "And I'm nervous. I am very competitive. I hate to lose."

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Chiropractic care is about wellness, and fitness, and performance. "For Chuck McDonald, it means being able to compete at an elite fitness level," Dr. Cianci said.

"It is my task, in McDonald's fitness regime, to keep his spine and nervous system functioning at an optimum level, to ready him not only for the CrossFit Games but for his senior years which lie ahead," Dr. Cianci continued. "Chuck is a good example of someone who took ownership of his body."

But competing at an elite level is not without its hazards. Only weeks before departing for the games, and during intense training, McDonald injured his left shoulder. The programs in the CrossFit Games are dominated by such challenges as chest high pull-ups and barbell hoisting, first 10 times, then 20 and then 30, all against a ticking clock.

McDonald said he was aware of the unanticipated weakness of the left shoulder and simply could not measure up.

"You have to be in absolutely tip-top shape to win," he said.

In the end, he was assigned a ranking of 15th in his age group across the broad spectrum of CrossFit competition — still firmly in the top 20 — and he came home utterly exhausted.

"My body was worn out," he said. But he took two weeks away from the CrossFit facility on Needwood Avenue in Easton, then returned to training.

He's determined to raise that ranking bar. "It's in my blood now," he said.

Dr. Cianci's monthly columns appear on a regular basis in the "Life" section of The Sunday Star on the first Sunday of every month. The column is entitled "The Cianci Chronicles." Watch for it!
