

Kristina Kaufman – Blythe Family Fitness

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Being fit: That should be a goal for everyone. Health and physical fitness should be important to every individual. Today we'll learn about a family fitness center which is working hard to involve people of all ages and to make their rural community even more healthy and physically fit. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Kristina Kaufman is executive director of Blythe Family Fitness in Pratt. She studied at McPherson College and met her husband through friends. He was a competitive bodybuilder and she gained interest in fitness and health through him. She later earned degrees in nutrition and business.

In 1996, Kristina and her husband opened a fitness center in Kingman. In 2004, they opened a second fitness center in downtown Pratt, upstairs from the Sears store, with approximately 15,000 square feet of space. Ultimately, Kristina and her husband were recruited to combine their business with the Blythe Family Fitness center as it began, and to manage and operate it as they do today.

"The Blythe family was from Pratt," Kristina said. "Their intention was to have a facility that would benefit the entire community," she said. The family contributed funds which were combined with support from the community to build the fitness center. A plaque inside the front door recognizes Roy and Elsie Blythe who "quietly strove to live the Golden Rule, graciously sharing their generous hearts, patience and encouragement."

In August 2011, Blythe Family Fitness opened its doors. The facility is a beautiful two-story building with approximately 50,000 square feet of space. This includes three basketball courts, a tennis court, a multi-purpose or training room, a racquetball court, tanning and spray tanning beds, and an extensive weight room. A walking track encircles one of the basketball courts. The center serves individual members and also hosts sporting events.

"We host gymnastics, volleyball and basketball tournaments," Kristina said. "Last week we even had archery."

True to its mission, the fitness center has opportunities for all ages. The center offers child care and summertime crafts for schoolchildren, a Retirefit program for age 60-plus, Tai Chi (I thought that was a flavor of tea), Pilates, yoga, Dance2Fit, group cycling, Execufit advanced weight training, classes, and more. There are offerings from competitive racquetball leagues to a smoothie bar and supplements.

"It's a good problem to have, but I'm running out of space," Kristina said. "We have people on waiting lists for our trainers." She still does some training herself but now works mostly on management of the business.

In honor of one local leader, Jack Ewing, an offering called Jack's after school program is provided for third through sixth graders. This includes games, exercise, homework time, leadership development, and healthy snacks developed in consultation with the local K-State Extension office.

"We are part of a Healthy Coalition committee which is working on a grant to encourage a more healthy community," Kristina said.

"The community is so supportive," Kristina said. "We work with the city, the high schools, the grade schools, the parks and rec department, and Pratt Community College."

Blythe Family Fitness has grown to more than 2,000 members. “Every year I try to find something new that we can offer,” Kristina said. “This is a very family-oriented place. That’s why I love it here,” she said.

For more information, go to www.blythefamilyfitness.org.

Guests from out of town are often quite impressed with Blythe Family Fitness. “People from bigger cities tell us that they don’t have as nice a facility as we have here in Pratt,” Kristina said. That’s a high compliment to Pratt, a rural community of 6,495 people. Now, that’s rural. “Our community has wonderful people, beautiful parks, and a terrific sports complex,” Kristina said. “I’m proud of Pratt.”

Being fit: That’s a goal which should be important to everyone. We commend Kristina Kaufman and all those involved with Blythe Family Fitness for making a difference by offering exercise alternatives for all ages. For the community of Pratt, this enterprise is a good fit.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.