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## LOCAL

### Centrum health club operator to target new demographics

By David Webb Staff Writer

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#### **Former LGBT gym to reopen in 2008 with significantly smaller space; club to feature mixed martial arts, women's workout area with day care**

The health club in the Centrum building will be reopening soon, but its glory days as a premiere gay and lesbian gym are apparently over.

Sam Mulroy, founder of Fitness Evolution, said he would be reopening the health club as a smaller facility targeting different demographics. The new club, which will be known as Diesel Fitness, will focus on mixed martial arts, and it will include a women's only exercise section and a day care facility.

Mulroy said that because of the location's two previous failures as a health club catering primarily to the gay and lesbian community, he has no choice but to try an alternative.

"That's just the reality of the situation," Mulroy said. "I had to build a new business plan based on the departure of all of the previous membership. The bottom line is we counted on the community for support for so long and truthfully, in talking with the members I was still in contact with, we can't anticipate or even expect another chance."



Sam Mulroy

The health club at the Centrum building had been known as a gay and lesbian gym since 1989 when the building was first constructed. It operated as the Centrum Sports Club until 2003 when building management locked up the facility after its longtime operators fell months behind in paying the rent.

Mulroy reopened it in 2005 as part of his Fitness Evolution chain and sold it nine months later to a new operator, who renamed it the Turtle Creek Athletic Club. It operated under that name for about a year until building management again locked the doors for non-payment of several months rent. Many members had also suffered from a similar closure at another big gym in downtown Dallas in between the closures of the Centrum Sports Club and the Turtle Creek Athletic Club.

Membership at the Turtle Creek Athletic Club, which was operated by Michael Liebermann, began draining because of new competitors in Uptown and downtown Dallas, Mulroy said.

"He ran into the same difficulties the previous owner did — high rent and not enough income," Mulroy said.

Mulroy said he was the guarantor on the lease at the Centrum building so the financial responsibility again fell on his shoulders for the remaining time left on the lease when the doors were locked.

"For the last six months we've been negotiating with them and going back and forth on a lot of stuff and found a mutual ground," Mulroy said. "They're going to take back a lot of the space and gave us some free rent to do some construction."

Liebermann, who tried unsuccessfully to get the facility reopened after he was locked out, said he is uncertain if he will be involved in Mulroy's new operation in any capacity.

"We haven't gotten that figured out," said Liebermann, who is a friend of Mulroy's and was a manager for him before he launched the Turtle Creek Athletic Club. "This is pretty much all Sam's deal."

Mulroy said the new facility would already have been open had it not been for a flood from the fifth floor that ruined

20,000 square feet of new carpet that had just been installed.

"It's a mess in there," Mulroy said. "I don't know where that puts us in terms of reopening. Their insurance is talking about trying to clean some of it to see if it looks like new but if not, we have to get new carpet. That kind of backed us up a bit."

Mulroy said he is hopeful his new concept focusing on mixed martial arts, of which the Ultimate Fighting Championship is an example, will attract a new clientele to the health club. Freddie Poole, who advertises his program on his Web site as "a safe and family-oriented martial arts experience for students of all ages," will be involved in the new venture, he said.

"It's a fast growing sport, and it's huge," Mulroy said. "We're trying to piggy back on that."

Mulroy said he expects the clientele at the facility to be different, with the exception of his friends in the LGBT community who will want to come back to train with him.

"I can't count on anyone who used to work out there working out there again," Mulroy said. "I think it's going to be a completely different atmosphere. I think the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

Mulroy said he is grateful for the support he received from the LGBT community when he first opened his gyms in Oak Lawn.

"I thank the community for all of their support in the past. I couldn't have gotten it going in the West Village and the Centrum without them. There would be no way."

Mulroy said he has sold the Fitness Evolution gyms he opened in the West Village and Plano, and the Denton facility is under contract to a purchaser.

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