

Food With a Side of Fitness

Tossing exercise classes into the mix is part of Sweetgreen's plan to create healthy lifestyles

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POSTED ON JANUARY 22, 2013



Ambassador Mimi Rieger is offering a yoga class Saturday at the Georgetown Lululemon.

Nothing's sweeter than free fitness classes. That's what 23-year-old Rachel Stump thought last week when she got an email from Sweetgreen — the local purveyor of salads, fro-yo and juices — introducing [Sweetgreen Passport](#).

The program invites the chain's customers to try barre, cycling, yoga and other active pursuits with instructors who have been designated Sweetgreen ambassadors. By Friday evening, Stump was swinging kettlebells, bear crawling and pretending to cross-country ski at a Balance Gym boot camp led by Devin Maier.

"This is a lot of fun. He keeps you moving constantly," said Stump, who normally bikes for exercise and appreciated the change of pace.

And Maier appreciated the new faces: "Their customers blend in with our members. They're mindful of what they eat, want stuff sourced locally and support locally owned businesses."

In Sweetgreen parlance, they're looking for the "sweetlife," explains director of experiential marketing Kyle Francis. Recognizing that fitness is a key part of that package, he borrowed the ambassador idea from [Lululemon](#), which provides apparel to select instructors in exchange for promotion.

He also borrowed most of his ambassadors from the Lululemon roster, and the companies co-sponsor several Passport events. That includes an [Energetic Flow](#) yoga class with Mimi Rieger and Rob Hess at 5 p.m. this Saturday at the Georgetown Lululemon store. (It's one of the few events that costs money, but the \$25 charge also includes food and drink.)

Rieger got involved because she wanted to teach yoga to the kids enrolled in the ["Sweetgreen in Schools"](#) program. It'll likely expand this spring when a new YMCA opens at 14th and W streets NW. Not only will there be a Sweetgreen location at street level, but the building will also have a Sweetgreen classroom and test kitchen for community programming.

"When you have fitness and food together, you're so much more successful," Rieger says.

That's Francis' theory for Sweetgreen, too. Although the ambassadors aren't employed by the company — they get paid in food — he wants them to feel like they're part of the team. So when the company was reformulating its line of juices, he asked Dance Trance's Sarah Sands (see below) for feedback.

There's no blueprint for turning a restaurant into a lifestyle, Francis says. But one sign that the strategy is working? Stump wasn't surprised at all to get an opportunity to exercise from Sweetgreen.

"They're always trying to advocate for overall wellness," she said. "Maybe this will get their competitors to start doing it, too."



Sarah Sands' high-energy Dance Trance classes keep students moving and smiling.

Ambassador Sarah Sands

The point of Sweetgreen Passport is to introduce customers to fitness opportunities in the District, and there's nothing fresher than Dance Trance. Sarah Sands, 31, fell for the choreographed classes while attending law school in Florida.

"It was a catalyst for wonderful things in my life. I started eating better, having a healthier lifestyle," Sands says. Flash forward to 2012: When Sands realized that working as a lobbyist in Washington wasn't in line with her priorities, she quit her job and brought Dance Trance to D.C. (Dancetrancefitness.com/dc).

Over the past six months, she's built up a following of dozens of women who flock to a dance studio at the Thomas Circle Balance Gym five days a week to sweat under flashing lights until the mirrors fog up. The variety of moves — including modern, jazz and hip-hop — keeps students on their toes. And Sands' smiles keep them comfortable even when they don't know what they're doing. ("Breakdown" classes slowly go over the routines, but "High Cardio" ones just zoom straight through a playlist.)

"Some places you show up, and no one talks to you. This is the opposite," says 29-year-old Dupont resident Lauren Campos, who's as much into the socializing as the steps. (And she's a former Zumba instructor.)

Sands, who plans to open more Dance Trance locations in 2013, is a very different kind of lobbyist these days. She's pushing Washingtonians to feel better about themselves through dance — and salad.

On the List: Only Passport subscribers (find the link at Sweetgreen.com/blog) will get the fitness-class lineup next month. The email will go out on or around Feb. 15 — and you'd better be ready to commit. For now, slots are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

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