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Summer projects

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Jeanne LeSage, centre, is taking part in Original Fitness' Beach Boot Camp programme over the summer. Delores Johnson / The National

# Feeling the burn

Three weeks have passed since our four determined participants started their summer challenges. Is the heat from trying to get in shape, learn Arabic, start a business and write a screenplay starting to get to them? Katie Boucher finds out.

**Jeanne LeSage is the managing producer of the Abu Dhabi Film Festival. She is doing Original Fitness' Beach Boot Camp.**

So, week three is called "hell week", and they're true to their word. I swear our coaches Corey and Phil have had a gleam in their eyes all week. It was hard at the beginning, but I'm really starting to get into my stride now and my body is starting to respond to the exercise. It's not that it's easy, but I find that I'm liking it more. To get up and go at 5.15am is now no problem. It is getting hotter, though, so you have to be mindful the night before to hydrate, and also in the morning before you go out, otherwise you really start to feel it. There are some mornings when you're out there and your glasses are fogging up and you just think: "I can't believe this is happening." But once you get rolling with the exercise you get into a zone and it's fine.

I am really glad I'm doing the morning sessions rather than the evening ones, because I tend to work a little bit later and I like getting up in the morning, clear head, clear slate, and going and doing it. And then it's done. I know if I did it in the evening, it would probably be hotter and also I would never have the discipline to get there for 7.30pm. I'd rather get there for 6am. It works better for me.

I'm addicted. I get it now. I think it's a combination of having the chance to push yourself and to see those results in the session. And you see them almost immediately in terms of energy and focus. There's some-

thing about the group aspect of it as well; the whole experience is addictive.

**Murtuza Kaizar is the branch manager of Hafele, a German company that supplies the construction industry with door hardware. He is studying level three Arabic at Berlitz Language School in Abu Dhabi.**

This week I made my first attempt at writing in Arabic on a topic. With my course, the main aim is to concentrate on spoken Arabic, but since I will start to learn the writing later on, my tutor advised me to try it. Of course I made lots of spelling mistakes but he understood the gist of it.

Conversation-wise I am much more talkative now. In fact, my tutor has to tell me to stop talking and get back to the lesson. It's very enjoyable. Yesterday when I went swimming in my building, someone asked me in Arabic: "Where have you bought this swimming tube for your son?" And I replied back in Arabic exactly. And then I was communicating with the lifeguard in Arabic as well.

I sound much more confident. Initially when I was talking back with my tutor I was not loud and clear, probably because I was afraid of making a mistake. Now when I talk I do it loudly and clearly and I'm not ashamed of making mistakes. So what if I say "heart" instead of "dog"? I won't worry. That's how kids learn: by making mistakes.

I am now trying to find a good Arabic movie to watch. Unfortunately,

with so many different dialects, I am still wondering which one I should choose. Should an Egyptian movie be better for me or would a Syrian movie work better? The dialect I am studying is more of the local dialect that the UAE nationals speak and unfortunately there are not many movies made locally.

However, this week I made a major breakthrough: I convinced my wife to start learning Arabic as well. Initially she was not up for it. She thought it wouldn't interest her and that it was too difficult. But I said to her if you're thinking of living here for long, you don't want to be standing with a group of friends who are all communicating in Arabic and feel left out. So she said fine, you teach me, and I'll see how it goes. I have got the course material from levels one and two so I will revise with her in the mornings before I leave for work. It will be good practice for me as well.

**Julie Meer is starting up Body Balancers, a wellness, sports and physiotherapy centre, in Jumeirah Lake Towers, Dubai.**

This week was a bit of a frustration, mainly because I've been waiting for quotes from contractors. There have been a lot of broken promises and them saying: "We'll have it tomorrow," which then turns into three or four days later. I try to explain to them that I would rather they just admit that they're too busy to take the job than to keep me waiting. But they won't. And unfortunately these

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Jeanne LeSage

delays have such an impact. I started to pay rent on July 1, so waiting for them for three weeks to come back has put me in a very precarious position financially. Because of this I can't move forward with my paperwork because DOHMS (the Department for Health and Medical Services) needs the contractor's drawings before I can book them to come in and do an inspection.

Meanwhile I'm also at the start of the second phase of the application stage with Jumeirah Lake Towers. I've encountered obstacles here, too.

Some kind of flowchart with clear, step-by-step instructions on the licensing process would be really helpful because there's nothing to help you find out about the interaction between the various departments. There are a lot of people here with great ideas and a lot of commercial real estate property available, but sometimes some of the steps along the way make it very difficult for people to open businesses.

It's taken a lot more for me to try to stay positive this week but you need to try to find other things that you can accomplish to keep things moving forward. So instead we've got the copy written for the website and we've moved forward with the business cards and some of the flyers.

**Steve Watson used to work in media but has, since arriving in Abu Dhabi last August, been a house husband. He is writing his first screenplay.** I've been getting inspiration this

week by sitting in Jones the Grocer and Emirates Palace cafes. I find it easier to write when I have people around me. You're also people-watching and it brings up ideas and thoughts when you see people having their lunch. I went to the Lime Tree Cafe in Dubai, which is meant to be full of Jumeirah Janes.

It was unbelievable. I just wanted to go and see them interact and air-kiss and talk about their day-spa treatments and whinge about the football.

I didn't think most women took much interest in the World Cup but these Jumeirah Janes did. I spent a morning there and it was fascinating watching them. It beats locking yourself up in your study. You'll be sitting among the crowd writing away and then all of a sudden you'll see something and think "ah..."

All of my characters are based on real life, but then through the minds and conversations with others they're starting to morph into something different. Now I just need to think how would they react to the situations I'm putting them in. I want to bring the story to life emotionally, in such a way that people can relate to it.

The real challenge is to stay focused. The good thing is that lots of people keep asking me how it's coming along. That keeps me on track and enthused to deliver. Writing this screenplay is almost like being pregnant: ultimately you've got to deliver something. It's a lot of pressure.