

Underground Gym digs into the 'Peg

BY KAREN MCKINLEY
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Passion is contagious, as the operator of a local gym can attest to.

The Underground Gym in Thunder Bay has a new extension in Winnipeg, which opened April 10. Going by the same name, it's run by the same operator, Peter Panetta, and his son-in-law, Charles Casmey, Peter's son Cerone, and daughter Chyenne Casmey.

"The response has been amazing," Charles says. "We are averaging 20 kids a night and we are growing by the day."

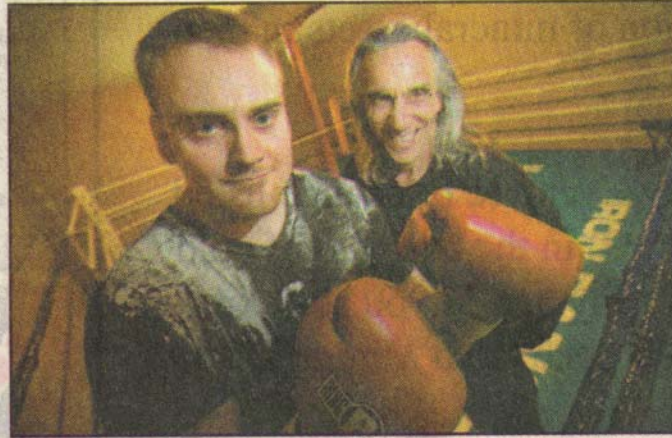
Charles said the gym, a three-storey operation, is focusing on exercise and aerobics for at-risk youth and their families. The gym includes a boxing ring, treadmills, dumbbells, open space, punching bags and medicine balls, all brought from Thunder Bay by Panetta. They currently have three programs in Winnipeg: Weights, boxing and cardio training. Charles added they are now offering karate classes.

Charles said he was inspired by his father-in-law to start the other Underground Gym for the same reason Panetta founded the Underground Gym in Thunder Bay, to give young people a place to go and participate in positive activities.

"My father-in-law has been a big help in getting this gym started," Charles said.

Panetta stressed the Winnipeg Underground Gym is an extension of the Thunder Bay gym, not a franchise. He said they started working on the concept a year ago and tried to get Winnipeg's mayor to secure sponsorship.

"The city liked the concept, but nothing solid materialized from our request," Panetta said. "We did every-



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Peter Panetta, right, and his son-in-law Charles Casmey are seen in a boxing ring at their new gym in Winnipeg.

thing ourselves and I brought all the equipment from Thunder Bay to get started."

The Winnipeg Underground Gym will only have a few programs, Panetta said, until they can get more funding and gauge how much interest is in the city for the gym. Panetta added he is open to further extending the Underground Gym concept westward.

"If the concept is working in Thunder Bay and Winnipeg, I can't see why not going to other cities," Panetta said. "All we need is sponsorships and volunteers to come forward."

In the meantime, Panetta said he is running the Winnipeg location with plans to have another meeting with the city's mayor as soon as they get 150 youth registered at the gym.