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A GYM OF OUR OWN
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ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Music blares from overhead, chains rattle, metal clashes to the floor, and a symphony of men roaring fills the air. The All People’s TyRon Lewis Community Gym which is located in Midtown, seems to have a revolving door. Member after member walks in, signs their name into a log book, and enters the gym ready to better their lifestyle.

The gym is a program provided by African People’s Education and Defense Fund (APEDF) which is dedicated to defending the human and civil rights of the African American community. There are 44 members, and although it appears small from the outside the inside is furnished with all the necessary equipment the members need to achieve an accomplished workout. The gym does not require a yearly contract, instead a monthly fee of $20.00 is collected. They also provide a sliding pay scale for the members who may need some financial assistance.

Along with a fully equipped gym, the facility provides multiple programs including Boxerobics, and Body Camps. The programs are free for members and $5.00 for non-members. Another program offered by the gym is a Kids Fit Camp that is provided free of charge for all children in the community.

The manager of the center and certified personal trainer, John Thomas, believes it is not just the adults who need to change but that a healthy community starts with the children.

"Kids are playing too many video games," Thomas explains. "We want them to get back to being kids."

The program is held outside and uses running, jumping, and playing to show the kids how fun exercising can be.

Another thing the Tyron Lewis Gym provides is nutrition counseling. Thomas works to teach members how to eat right on a budget.

"It’s expensive to eat healthy, but the revolution starts at your dinner plate," Thomas said.

Thomas is not unfamiliar with the struggles and hardships of achieving a healthy lifestyle. He was once overweight and diagnosed with both diabetes and high blood pressure, which Thomas says are two of the most common health problems in the Midtown community. This was a wake-up call for him and he began to change his eating and exercise habits. With no help from medications Thomas was able to reverse both these disorders.

"It is near and dear to my heart that these problems can be fixed without medication," Thomas said.

Thomas is not the only success story TyRon Lewis Gym holds. Although Thomas' inspiration fuels the gym’s members it is a fellow member who acts as instant motivation.
Leonard Rodgers lost his left leg in a motorcycle accident, but you can still find him at the gym every weekday—sometimes twice a day. As Rodgers does bicep curls, standing without the aid of a prosthetic leg, gym member Bennie Diflavis stops to admire Rodgers’ ambition.

“This is amazing, give me an excuse,” Diflavis shouts as he points to Rodgers.

It is obvious this gym is not just a building full of exercise equipment and muscular men. It is a building filled with stories and inspirations.

The only real problem the center encounters is getting more people to realize the benefits of living healthy. Gym volunteer Danyelle Wilson knows community is strong throughout the Midtown area and is usual source of inspiration for people.

“The residents really need community to get them in here,” Wilson explains.

Community is exactly what the Tyron Lewis Gym offers.

“We are one big family here,” gym manager Thomas said.