

Ferrell's National Challenge - From Death to Life by Frank Stillone

I was raised in an Italian home where food was an important part of my culture. I learned to use food to deal with my emotions, as entertainment, to celebrate, self-protect, and cope with stress. Over the years I developed a dependence on food. That dependence gripped me and it would not let go. I became obese and as a result struggled with low self-esteem, shame, mood swings, mild depression, and was constantly disappointed with myself. I defaulted to self-defeating thoughts and avoided participating in certain activities and social situations. Over time my physical health deteriorated. I developed Type-2 diabetes, high cholesterol, sleep apnea, chronic fatigue and was considered to be stage-3 morbidly obese.

Like many, I tried "everything". I read numerous books, tried all kinds of diets, saw a counselor, joined health clubs, and hired a personal trainer. Short of having surgery, you name it, I tried it - nothing worked. After over 40 years of struggling with the physical, emotional, psychological, behavioral and spiritual effects of obesity, I was giving up the fight.

I was introduced to Ferrell's by a colleague and friend, Kent Walker. Kent encouraged me to join Ferrell's. My reaction was, "You're crazy... I could never do that." He often talked about how intense and challenging but fun the Ferrell's workouts were. I thought to myself, "There is no way a 334 pound person can do a Ferrell's workout and survive." However, his transformation of muscle gain was undeniable. The before and after pictures of the 10-Week Challenge winners were impressive and the stories of the Ferrell's National Challenge Winners were amazing. The thought of having a heart-attack on the mat was a terrifying possibility. However, doing nothing and making my wife a young widow was almost a certainty. I decided I would rather risk dying on the mat, fighting for my life, than die on the couch watching television. **I'm in.**

Filled with fear, uncertainty and doubt, I walked into Ferrell's on October 10, 2016 for my first 5 AM class. I was afraid I would not be accepted, uncertain I could complete one class, not to mention 10 weeks, and doubtful Ferrell's was going to work for me. I was greeted with staff and volunteers who were welcoming and genuinely excited for the new group of 10-Weekers. Ken and Mike were one of the first who invited me to be their workout partner. They welcomed me and made me feel like I belonged. Ken Klitzke has become my advocate, mentor and good friend. I quickly discovered that the Ferrell's Maple Grove community was one that accepts, encourages, builds-up, cares, challenges, celebrates, protects and loves people. The instructors, managers and owners are second to none.

At the baseline testing, I could only do 6 pushups. When it was time to do sit-ups, I could not even do one. I was crushed because I realized I was laying on my back, the position of death and I couldn't get up. For weeks during workouts, I could only do crunches. I will never forget the day I was able to do my first full sit-up on my own. It felt like coming to life. At the end of the 10 weeks cycle, I was stunned when my name was announced as the winner. Winning the challenge, and the overwhelming reaction of my Ferrell's family gave me incredible hope. Perhaps Ferrell's could help me accomplish my life-long dream of becoming healthy and fit. I can't say enough about the encouragement of the Ferrell's family throughout this journey. Everyone has been so positive, complimentary, and supportive which has propelled me forward. As I tell everybody about my Ferrell's experience, it's been rewarding to see friends and family inspired to begin their own Ferrell's journey. My wife, along with my good friend Kirk, his wife, four other friends and two nieces have joined Ferrell's. My transformation has caused many people from my coffee house, church and professional relationships to inquire about my experience and I'm thrilled to share Ferrell's with them.

I was taking a lot of medication for my diabetes and high cholesterol. It was costing us thousands of dollars. A year after starting Ferrell's, down 120 pounds, my doctor announced that I was no longer diabetic and officially removed that label from my medical records. With the help of Ferrell's and healthy eating, I reversed my diabetes! He also informed me I no longer had high cholesterol and took me off ALL medications! I no longer suffer from sleep apnea and I have the energy to live life to the fullest!

Ferrell's has given me (an even better version of) the life I've always wanted. I love showing up at 5AM to workout with my crew. Through Ferrell's I've gained a community of friends who value a healthy life-style, who workout hard and play hard, who generously support those in need both within the Ferrell's community and the community at large. Ferrell's has set me free from my dependence on food and restored my life.

My Ferrell's story has been a story of redemption; the act of buying back or reclaiming what was lost and could not be regained on my own. Ferrell's has been God's gift in reclaiming my life. A verse that has fueled my fitness journey is Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes...". This past year I chose to trust God's invitation to join him in the struggle of becoming fully alive. I am immensely grateful for all that Ferrell's has given me - a transformed life.