

Get Fit at the Railroad

Free fitness classes bring people of all backgrounds to the city center.

BY JENNIFER DOME
PHOTOS FROM BIRMINGHAM
NEWS ARCHIVES

IF YOU DRIVE BY RAILROAD PARK DURING THE EARLY EVENING, you may notice a crowd of people sweating.

No, it's not the Alabama heat. These people— young and old, male and female, different races and backgrounds— have come together with one thing in mind: fitness.

For the past two years, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama has sponsored the Get Healthy on the Railroad series. Each weekday at 6 p.m., exercise classes are held that appeal to a variety of interests and fitness levels. From Crunk Fitness (a hip-hop dance class) to Zumba and yoga, each day gives attendees a new chance to burn calories— for free.

“Healthy living is an important part of what we offer [at Railroad Park],” says Camille Spratling, executive director of the Railroad Park Foundation. “Not everyone can join a gym, or maybe people with a [gym] membership want to exercise outside.”

And she's right. A big reason why Conrhonda Baker, the Birmingham Museum of Art membership director, has been faithful to the

Get Healthy classes at the park is the chance to exercise in fresh air. “I really do like the outdoor atmosphere,” Baker says. “It's also the most egalitarian space that we have in the city. There's really no other place in town that is like that.”

Crunk Fitness instructor Jammie Morginn echoes Baker's feelings about the classes bringing people together. She says it's one place in

Birmingham where you see all ages and races and genders mix together, and it's why she'll be back this year to teach classes at Railroad Park.

Koko Mackin, vice president of corporate communications and community relations for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama, says the company is always looking for opportunities to help Alabamians live healthier lives. “Get Healthy on the Railroad encourages individuals and families to be active, have fun and make healthy choices,” she says. “If we all keep moving and participate in some form of exercise, we can help build a healthier Birmingham and a healthier Alabama.”

Spratling says the support from Blue Cross Blue Shield has been inspiring: “It's great to see how committed they are to wellness.” In fact, the company encouraged the foundation to spread the message about healthy eating, as well, leading to the offering of farm stands, which will return on Thursdays this year, from 5:30-7:30 p.m.

And Mackin, for one, is thrilled with the community's response to the Get Healthy initiative. “In 2012, nearly 1,000 individuals from the Birmingham community participated in the free exercise classes offered from March through October. We have had several participants call or email Blue Cross to thank us and express their appreciation for the free classes. One woman shared with us that she had lost 10 pounds due to the fitness classes,” Mackin says.

“We've continued it because we love the vibrancy [of the classes] and because we always have good crowds,” Spratling says. But in addition to the obvious health benefits, bringing people together is an added bonus. She says, “Railroad Park is a unifying place.” ■



Details

2013 Get Healthy classes

Weekdays, 6-7 p.m.

Monday: Crunk Fitness

Tuesday: Bootcamp

Wednesday: Zumba

Thursday: Yoga

Friday: Happy Feet (low- to high-impact walking)

Farm stands: Thursdays, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

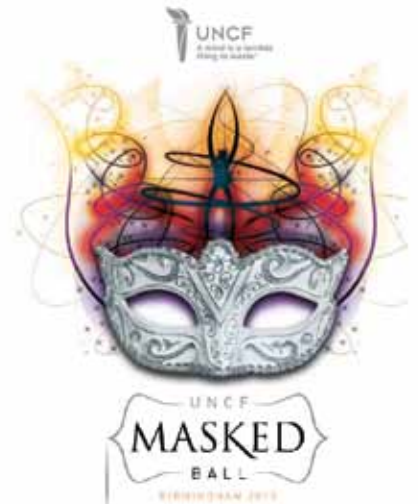


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—Koko Mackin, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama



Yoga classes are offered Thursdays at 6 p.m. at Railroad Park as part of Blue Cross Blue Shield's 2013 Get Healthy Classes.



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