

Meet **CARI DRAFT**

By Erika Fifelski



HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE ECOTREK FITNESS CONCEPT AND PUT IT TO WORK?

A: In 2006, I spent time in Portland, Oregon, at the NIKE headquarters receiving my "Outdoor Action Certification" as a personal trainer. That's where I was inspired by several trainers who took groups of runners out to do cross-training exercises during their runs. I came back to Michigan, sharing that outdoor philosophy with my friends, but took it a step further by incorporating strength training, flexibility stretches, and cardio elements into every outdoor group workout. After one year of leading these workout sessions myself at various locations along the lakeshore, I worked hard to hire other leaders/trainers in other cities all over Michigan—using my same formula—and we set up similar workout routes with the terrain available in each area. The popularity has grown each year, and now I have twelve EcoTrek Fitness Series all over Michigan, offering sessions

year-round in all weather for all fitness levels—as far north as Traverse City, as far east as Lansing, and reaching beyond Grand Rapids to Kalamazoo as well! I've met many amazing people throughout this adventure. EcoTrek Fitness attracts very cool people.

WHY ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT FITNESS?

A: How could I not be passionate about fitness! Everything about it is invigorating and enlightening, and the positivity opens so many more opportunities for everyone involved. It's so rewarding to help other people reach their own healthy lifestyle goals. It's a great process to watch someone make physical changes that help in every area of their lives.

WHY IS FITNESS SOMETHING EVERYONE SHOULD INCORPORATE INTO HIS OR HER ROUTINE?

A: Taking care of ourselves, our health, and our bodies is something everyone needs

to do before they can help anyone else, really. As a trainer, it can be a challenge just figuring out exactly what will motivate certain people into action: What will be the one thing to get them moving, to take charge of their own physical well-being, or to make lifestyle changes that will make them healthier, prolong their lives, and most likely make them happier people in general? Some individuals have it figured out on their own, and just need the tools to find success; others need help figuring out what caused their unhealthy, self-destructive behavior in the first place, and it's gratifying to empower those clients.

WHAT DOES ECOTREK FITNESS MEAN TO YOU? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WEST MICHIGAN?

A: I'm all about getting people outside, moving, breathing, laughing—feeling like a kid again, really. Some of our best workout experiences have been when it's pouring rain or sideways-blowing snow! I think of EcoTrek Fitness being

controlled mini-adventures, since each workout is different every time, and we are usually exposing our EcoTrekkers to a trail or an exercise that they wouldn't normally see at home or in a gym. And as far as West Michigan goes, we have so many amazing parks, trails, and recreation areas available to us—it would be a shame not to explore them all! We've had people thank us for introducing them to areas they've lived in their entire lives and never knew existed, so we're opening up new "adventure" doors to many people in West Michigan—especially people who have told us they never really enjoyed certain seasons in our state before because of adverse weather: too hot, too cold, too snowy, too rainy. We love it all, and you can grow to love it, too!

YOUR ECOTREK FITNESS WHOLE FOOD BARS ARE SOLD EVERYWHERE! HOW COULD PARTNERING WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES HELP SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT HEALTH AND FITNESS?

A: The EcoTrek Whole Food

Bars have been instrumental in the year of their existence, introducing the outdoor workout concept to those who actually started eating the bars mainly because they taste good, not necessarily because they were looking for a healthy bar to eat! That's been an incredible side effect of the bars. Partnering with local shop owners has been such a treat: I've been able to lead warm-ups at lots of local events, meeting the customers who enjoy the bars and inspiring them to take their own workouts outside. The bars make a great "fuel" for hiking, biking, kayaking—you name it!

WHAT NUTRITIONAL VALUE DO YOUR BARS ADD TO THE DAILY DIET?

A: With my personal training clients and EcoTrekkers, I've always advocated healthy eating choices—fresh fruits, vegetables, and grains whenever possible. It's exciting for me to offer these bars for those times when they didn't have time to pack those foods

along—and they're glad they can grab an EcoTrek Bar to get them through those situations! It was important to me to keep the calories under two hundred, yet still have the ten grams of protein in each bar so you would keep that full, satisfied feeling longer—and not get the sugar rush of a typical candy bar. The vitamins and healthy ingredients taste amazing when they're covered in a tasty, high-quality dark chocolate!

TELL READERS ABOUT YOUR PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS.

A: Hands down, I am most proud of my family, husband, and son, of course! Professionally, I am proudest of the small day-to-day achievements of getting my fitness clients through a difficult workout on their hardest day, or introducing a new EcoTrekker to my love for the outdoors through a new trail or fun new exercise. It was a great experience to travel to Lansing and Detroit in May of this past year, as a 2012 Governor's

Fitness Awards (Michigan Fitness Council) Extraordinary Organization Award Honoree; only three are awarded annually in the state of Michigan. The other notable recognition was the 2010 Presidential Council on Health & Fitness Community Leadership Award, as EcoTrek Fitness provided a positive experience locally in health and fitness; only fifty of those are awarded throughout the nation, each year. In 2013, EcoTrek Fitness is partnering with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to help expose Michigan residents to what our state parks and recreation areas have to offer the public, so there's more excitement ahead in the near future.

HOW DO YOU BALANCE BEING A BUSINESS OWNER, WIFE, MOTHER, AND FRIEND, NOT TO MENTION KEEPING UP A REGULAR EXERCISE ROUTINE?

A: There's no doubt it's been challenging, just like it is for most women. Exercise has

always been a part of my life; I schedule it into my week like everything else I plan in. The key is not allowing those workouts to be "bumped" by anything else. It's tricky. Just because we can do it all, doesn't mean we should do it all, because we need to take care of ourselves in order to take care of others. The key for me has been learning to pace myself better, prioritize my career efforts, and make better use of delegation techniques.

FOR THOSE OF US WHO ARE JUST STARTING TO PUT TOGETHER A FITNESS ROUTINE, WHAT ARE SOME QUICK TIPS TO HELP US STAY ON BOARD LONG-TERM?

A: Don't overlook your eating choices. They are just as important as your workout routine. Definitely incorporate both strength training and cardio time into your plan. Always keep the long term in mind—skip the "quick fix" and make real lifestyle changes. You'll see lasting results! **WMM**

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