



A group of F3 members perform "Handslap Merkins" as they wait for the other group to return from a run around the parking lot. Photo Courtesy of Brian "Dilfer" Gawthrop

F3 brings local men together for fitness, fellowship and faith

Reporter Kailan Manadic participates in a morning workout with the local men's fitness group and is nicknamed after a well-known crime dog.

By Kailan Manadic

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Most of us who aren't athletes or fitness devotees wouldn't generally consider waking up before the sunrise to work out at 5:30 a.m. as a fun idea. Try doing it multiple days a week, outside in the rain, shine, sleet or snow.

I was recently invited to participate in an F3 workout session where I met 24 local men at Grasslawn Park in Redmond. Journalism calls for late nights more often than early mornings, so I was fortunate enough to participate in the Labor Day workout, which met at 7 a.m., leaving me enough time to crawl out of bed.



A group of F3 members perform "Handslap Merkins" as they wait for the other group to return from a run around the parking lot. Photo Courtesy of Brian "Dilfer" Gawthrop

THE FIRE

F3 is a national men's fitness group that focuses on building local, tight-knit communities for men to keep their minds and bodies in shape.

"I knew it was possible [for F3 to thrive] here, but I just didn't know anyone and I didn't understand the nuances in culture," said Jason Silverstein who established F3 in the Puget Sound region. "[Now], there are hundreds of guys in it now and I'm really really humbled and honored that the guys leading it now understand the principles...This is not a club where you pay dues, it's something to be respected and given away."

The workouts are exclusively peer-led and any given day, local participants will find themselves going through a variety of aptly named exercises, from "little baby crunches" to "Jillian Michaels." An extensive lexicon of F3 terms and exercise names can be found online and range from jokingly clever to somewhat silly.



F3 members perform "Leprechaun in the Woods", also known as squat jumping jack, as they wait for another group to return from a lap around the parking lot. Photo Courtesy of Brian "Dilfer" Gawthrop

Silverstein, known as "AP" within F3, brought F3 over from the East Coast when he moved here in 2015. The organization has roots in Charlotte, North Carolina, where the founding members hosted the first workout in 2011. Females in Action, a women's fitness community, spun off of F3 and has found a large following on the East Coast as well as in the South and Midwest but has not yet made its way to the Pacific Northwest.

AP was the "Q," or the leader for our Labor Day workout. Any F3 member can be the lead of a workout and eventually become a "site Q," but the position, and F3 as a whole, is also meant to help local men learn skills that push them to become leaders in their home communities.

"The whole goal is to improve male community leadership," said Stephen Burke, nicknamed Alexa, who's been with F3's Puget Sound chapter since the second workout. "The first opportunity for that is to step up, actually lead a workout and get to the fitness level where you can then lead. It's like a ladder of leadership that's built in."

FITNESS AND FRIENDSHIP

There are 15 workouts scheduled weekly at 12 different locations in Kirkland, Redmond, Bothell, Woodinville, Seattle and Tacoma. Most weekday workouts start bright and early at 5:30 a.m. and last 45 minutes, while weekend and holiday workouts start at 7 a.m., usually lasting an hour.

The workout locations and times can all be found online at F3Nation.com along with local events.

“We start on the minute and end on the minute so everyone gets exactly what they need out of the workout,” Burke said.

The Labor Day workout was exactly 45 minutes and pushed my limits as it was supposed to; I think I did more push-ups than I’ve ever attempted in a single session. That, paired with light running, jumping jacks, squats and a steady supply of burpees left me healthily sore the next day.

While this may sound intimidating, there was never any pressure to keep up with everyone else. If someone struggles during a workout, they’re welcomed with warm encouragement.



F3 members often meet for coffee after workouts as part of the community-building aspect of the group. Photo Courtesy of Brian "Dilfer" Gawthrop

F3 is all about a “you versus you” and a “no man left behind” mentality. Any participant is encouraged to be mindful of injuries and their own limits and front-runners are rewarded with an opportunity to plank until everyone has completed the exercise.

Several different members checked in with me to see how I was doing because of this mentality and it left me feeling like I was surrounded by friends instead of strangers I had known for less than an hour.

While the everyone knows the workout is “you versus you,” that doesn’t stop some members from getting into some friendly competition.

“I’m a small guy, so I can do body-weight fitness pretty well, that’s [what I’m good at],” Christian Benn, known as “Xbox,” said. “But what I found was my passion is the encouraging of men...people wanted to be around me because I drove hard and I had a smile on my face. And I wanted to be better because of the people around me.”

I had noticed that about Xbox throughout the workout and I'd describe him as equal parts encouraging and inspiring, all while being upbeat and friendly.

"Why do I go to a work out? Because DigDug is going to be there and I'm going to beat his a** today," Benn said with a laugh. "He's going to push me hard, I'm going to get better and he's going to get better."

FAITH AND COMMUNITY

The three Fs stand for fitness, fellowship and faith. F3 members stress that they don't define faith as a belief in any particular religion but as a simple belief in something outside of oneself.

Silverstein said the emphasis on welcoming any and all men into the group was an integral part of getting the ball rolling in the region.

"We're all Americans, but every region has a little bit of different flavor...In the Southeast the faith component of F3 is much more religion-based and that makes sense. It's the Bible Belt," Silverstein said. "But here, religion is not as big a part of the culture, people are still religious, it's just not in your face as much. So [we] had to explain that the faith component is actually defined as thinking of something bigger than yourself, however you define that."

The first F3 workout in this region only saw two participants in March 2016 and the group has grown to self sufficiency since then.

Silverstein said he initially contacted local churches in attempts to get their communities interested in F3, but they were unresponsive to the idea, thinking he was trying to sell them something. A major component of F3 is that it's free, which was a roadblock for Silverstein because a lot of the people he would reach out to would become suspicious.

"I was trying to get Alexa to come out for a couple of months," Silverstein said. "He was hesitant and it wasn't because he didn't believe in the faith component, he just didn't want to be preached to and I said it's not that at all. But he didn't come to the first workout because he wasn't sure."

Burke ended up attending the second workout after a mutual friend with Silverstein encouraged him to and regretted having doubts about the community.

Silverstein credits Burke and the other initial member as an integral part of bringing more people in as they had a better understanding of Pacific Northwest culture.

“That part of it was a big piece of the Pacific Northwest. It was just very difficult to get people to understand that I’m not trying to get something from you, I’m trying to give something away,” Silverstein said.

“Every person has their own little obstacle to coming,” Burke said. “It’s important to consider all those things when talking to people about F3... Giving away something for free is one of the hardest things you’ll ever do. It’s bizarre.”

Nearly 200 members are active in the Puget Sound, with up to about 20 or fewer showing up to any given workout. Twenty-five men participated in the Labor Day workout which was a high turnout due to the holiday.

“It’s humbling to see this [grow] and thrive,” Silverstein said.

I was designated a “Friendly New Guy (FNG)” for my first workout and was joined by another FNG during the Labor Day workout. Each F3 member receives their own nickname as they’re initiated into the group at the end of their first workout during the Circle of Trust (CoT).



F3 members sit in the Circle of Trust after the Labor Day workout session. Jason "AP" Silverstein led the workout and is in the center of the circle sharing Words of Wisdom. Photo Courtesy of Brian "Dilfer" Gawthrop

The CoT serves as a debrief after the workout and welcomes FNGs and gives the Q a chance to share a "Word of Wisdom," which is often an anecdote that highlights a way for everyone in the group to grow as community leaders.

After mentioning my position as the Eastside crime reporter, Alexa quickly dubbed me "McGruff," which the group enthusiastically approved.

"We had FNG McGruff — aka the crime dog — attend as part of a story he's doing," Silverstein wrote in the "Backblast," which the Q writes as a summary of each workout. "He also wore Vans to the workout. That might be a first."

The F3 community I met with on Labor Day was one of the most welcoming and friendly communities I've been a part of. That may be because I happened to find the most friendly group of men in the region, but I think

anyone who is looking for local friends or a fitness group would quickly find a home with these guys.

The Puget Sound F3 chapter hosts multiple annual fundraisers and make donations to local organizations, including school supplies donations to Friends of Youth, food donations to the Little Free Pantry and shoes and socks to Aurora Commons in Seattle.



F3 members meet for coffee at the Down Pour Coffee Bar in Redmond after the workout. Reporter Kailan "McGruff" Manandic sits with Jason "AP" Silverstein and Christian "Xbox" Benn (left). Photo Courtesy of Brian "Dilfer" Gawthrop

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