

// CELEBRATING THE AMERICAN SPIRIT //

American Profile

JANUARY 10-16, 2010



GUITAR GURU
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FITNESS KING

At 95, **JACK LALANNE** continues to inspire Americans to stay active, eat smart and live healthy.

Whatever happened to TV's 'A-Team'?



241 Mine (right) portrayed drummer Gene Krupa in *The Gene Krupa Story* in 1952

Godfather of Fitness

Jack LaLanne lives young

// STORY BY MARTA W. ALDRICH, FEATURES EDITOR

"I CAN'T DIE. It would ruin my image!" quips Jack LaLanne, who at age 95 works out for two hours each morning, eats at least 10 raw vegetables and five fresh fruits a day, and preaches the merits of regular exercise and good nutrition with the same evangelistic fervor that he did at age 21 when he opened the nation's first modern fitness club in Oakland, Calif.

Walking through one of two exercise rooms in his home in Morro Bay, Calif. (pop. 10,350), LaLanne grasps the bar on a weight machine like an old friend, explaining why he rises at 5 o'clock each morning to stretch, lift, pull and swim.

"Dying is easy. Living, you've got to work at," he says. "You've got to have goals and challenges."

Known as the Godfather of Fitness, LaLanne personifies the power of healthful living. He reigns over a long list of firsts in the fitness world—the first to host a nationally syndicated TV exercise show; promote weight training for athletes, women and older adults; open a coed health club; and sell vitamins and exercise equipment on television—to name a few. His reputation and celebrity have earned him both a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and a lifetime achievement award from the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

// Jack LaLanne at home in Morro Bay, Calif.





JOHN OH

// LaLanne celebrated his 95th birthday in September with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and other friends at a party in Beverly Hills, Calif.

His friends marvel that LaLanne continues to set the fitness standard.

"Jack will work out until he falls over and is dead, which could be 30 years from now," says California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, 62, whom LaLanne befriended in 1968 when the two-time Mr. Universe emigrated from Austria. "I am a big fan of his, and I have the utmost respect for his opinions on health and fitness. He lives it."

True to form, LaLanne is coming off a milestone year—celebrating more than nine decades of life, eight decades of exercising, and five decades of marriage to his wife, Elaine—all while promoting his 11th book, *Live Young Forever*. To LaLanne, the milestones are opportunities to spread the health and fitness message one more time.

"I live my life as an example to show people that I practice what I preach," he says. "There

are so many people still to be helped."

Born again

LaLanne's crusade stems from his personal transformation from a sickly, scrawny juvenile delinquent into a confident, handsome athlete, bodybuilder and businessman.

Born in San Francisco to French immigrants, LaLanne identifies his earliest friends as pies, cookies, candy and soft drinks. Living later on his grandfather's sheep ranch in Bakersfield, Calif., he saw fresh vegetables, fruit and eggs being trucked off to markets while his family ate processed and pack-

aged foods "that tasted good at the time." Nutrition was not a topic at the family table.

By his teen years, LaLanne was a junk-food junkie with pimples, glasses, discolored teeth and wild mood swings that got him into fights and trouble at home and school. "I was a weak, sick, miserable kid," LaLanne recalls with a cringe. "Even the girls would beat me up."

At age 15, LaLanne and his mother heard nutrition pioneer Paul Bragg speak in Oakland, and his message was life-changing for the troubled teen: "If you obey nature's laws—the foods you eat, the air you breathe—you can be born again."

That night, LaLanne asked God for the willpower to stop eating junk food, and the next day he joined the YMCA in Berkeley, where he began wrestling classes and daily workouts. He started reading everything he could find about health and nutrition, from muscle-building magazines

to medical journals and *Gray's Anatomy*. At Berkeley High School, he became quarterback and captain of the varsity football team and took up the shot put, high jump and pole vaulting.

In his backyard, LaLanne began experimenting with weightlifting equipment, at first lifting concrete blocks and later purchasing weights from a local foundry. Before long, policemen and firefighters were training with him to prepare for their physicals. He graduated from chiropractic school in Oakland, then opened a health club in 1936 to focus on preventative health care. There, he designed exercise equipment, including the first leg extension machines, pulley and cable machines, and weight selectors to strengthen many of the body's 640 muscles. "I had a piece of equipment for every part of the body," he says.

Jumping Jack

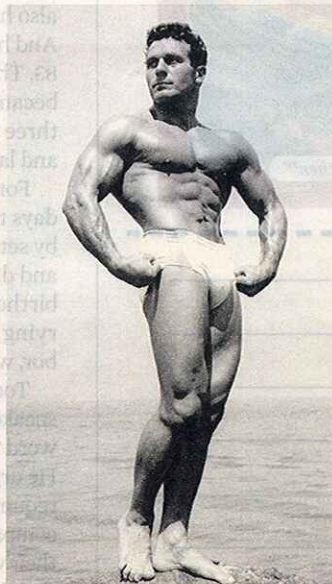
In those days, fitness wasn't in vogue. But as his chain of fitness centers grew, LaLanne took aim at America's faulty perceptions about exercise. "Some people portrayed me as a nut and crackpot," he remembers. "Doctors said that if you work out with weights, old guys will die of heart attacks, women will start to look like men, and athletes will become muscle-bound and slow. But my message was that men would become more masculine, women more feminine and athletes stronger and faster. You feel better. You look better."

In 1951, LaLanne was recruited to host TV's first exercise program live at KGO-TV in San Francisco. *The Jack LaLanne Show* soon aired nationwide in syndication, allowing a muscular LaLanne to come into millions of homes each day and lead mostly housewives in jumping jacks and floor exercises. Looking straight into the camera, LaLanne urged his viewers to stay active, eat smart and stop smoking.

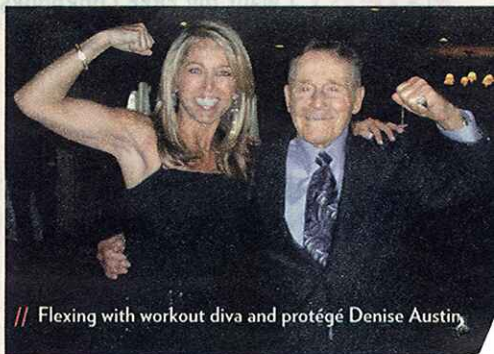
"I was their doctor, their mother, their father, their personal trainer," says LaLanne, who was 71 when the show ended in 1985. "People wrote me for advice. They exercised with me. Without a doubt, America's perception of fitness and health was changing."

He also inspired a new generation of fitness experts, including Denise Austin, a guest host

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// Starting his workouts at age 15 in Oakland, Calif. (left), LaLanne was a renowned bodybuilder at age 40 (center) and hosted his own nationally syndicated TV exercise show beginning in 1951 (right) with cameo appearances by his dog, Happy.



// Flexing with workout diva and protégé Denise Austin

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BEFIT ENTERPRISES

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on LaLanne's show in 1981, who says her mentor also is her idol.

"His approach was so simple that it was brilliant," says Austin, 52, who went on to sell millions of her own exercise videos. "He'd use simple props like a chair and would show viewers how to use the weight of their own bodies to stay in shape. His shows were only 30 minutes, but he emphasized consistency. And he was a big proponent of good posture."



COURTESY OF BEFIT ENTERPRISES

// LaLanne in the kitchen with wife Elaine

At the TV station, LaLanne met his second wife, a co-host and producer for a local variety show. "I would come into the office with my chocolate doughnut and smoking a cigarette," Elaine recalls. "Jack would say, 'You should be eating apples and bananas and oranges, and I wouldn't tell you this if I didn't like you.'"

Not only did he convince Elaine to change her habits, the charming muscle man made a larger impression. "The more I got to know him, the more I saw that he also had brains behind all those muscles. And he was very funny," says Elaine, now 83. The couple married in 1959, and Elaine became one of his co-hosts. They shared three children from previous marriages and later had a son together.

For decades, LaLanne used his birthdays to motivate himself and the world by setting records for chin-ups, push-ups and daring swimming feats. On his 70th birthday in 1984, he towed 70 boats carrying 70 people across Long Beach Harbor, with both hands and feet shackled.

Today, LaLanne is a motivational speaker and health advocate who says the word "fat" stands for "fatal, awful, trouble." He urges schools to remove junk food and require physical education classes, and for companies to provide workout facilities for their workers. And to people who have let their bodies go, he offers tough talk.

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COURTESY OF BEFIT ENTERPRISES



// For his 60th birthday in 1974, a shackled LaLanne towed a 1,000-pound boat on San Francisco Bay.

“Would you give your dog a cup of coffee, a cigarette and a doughnut in the morning? Would you put garbage in your car’s gas tank? Well, why do that to the human machine? It’s killing us.”

“You make it happen!” he says, urging people to work out vigorously three times a week for 30 minutes to an hour, while adopting a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and lean meats. “The rest of your life is the best of your life! I’m living proof.” ★

Visit www.jacklalanne.com for more information.

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