



Christian Heno is looking for workout space on the West Side.

plus Dan Torgert

Community centres big part of business Fitness entrepreneur feeling strike pinch

By Cheryl Rossi
Staff writer

Christian Heno is frustrated by the city strike. Eighty per cent of his business, Zenergy Holistic Health and Fitness, is at private personal trainers for clients at community centres.

But the 43-year-old isn't about to sit around and complain. "I don't like to be a victim," he said.

Since the strike began, his private training hours with clients have dropped by 11 to 20 per cent. Heno has looked into providing his services at private gyms, but many have their own trainers, and it takes time to build trust with the people who run Vancouver's highly competitive fitness market.

Some of his clients have had training sessions in their homes or outdoors, but it's difficult to do much without the proper space and equipment, Heno said, and he's found himself on the road 70 minutes a day, six days a week.

Heno hasn't sold a single training package this month, and September is usually a prime time to secure new clients. His sales in August dropped by 20 per cent.

Heno emigrated from France to Canada 11 years ago, drawn by the skiing, kayaking and hiking in the Lower Mainland. It took him a year to break into the city's fitness industry. Inspired by his limited English skills, he studied basic English while he was unemployed, taking advantage of the services offered by local immigrant settlement organizations.

He worked at the Body and Soul health club on West 10th Avenue in Point Grey for nine years and then started a small fitness program. He was inspired by the support, which he couldn't see in France, provided to small business entrepreneurs in Canada.

After developing a business plan, Heno started Zenergy, offering personal training mostly to Kildare residents, some of whom have long-standing health problems.

The martial arts expert teaches self-defence classes to women and teaches anti-violence programs at local high schools. Heno also runs a studio with other massage practitioners in Kildare.

His work with private clients at the West Point Grey and False Creek community centres is his most and greatest. But instead of fading, Heno's creating the stress-inducing strike as a catalyst for yet another chapter in his life. He's seeking studio space to lease, but it's not too easy to find. Space on the West Side where his clients live is at a premium, and wearing a lease, equipment and staff poses a massive problem.

Heno maintains he's happier sharing his concerns than waiting for someone more powerful than himself to sort out his problems, which is how he views the city's striking workers. Heno said he's spoken to politicians who would like to return to work. He sees them as victims of an outdated system ruled by powerful union leaders and politicians.

"They are essential services that are supposed to help the community but when something goes wrong there's no more essential workers, there's no more communities any more," he said. "It's all about them."