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Fitness machine

Former Winnipegger JENNIFER COHEN is turning herself into a well-toned North American conglomerate

By: Shamona Harnett

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CELEBRITY fitness trainer Jennifer Cohen is determined to kick the wafer-thin, big-busted Hollywood prototype off the covers of the tabloids and replace it with a more down-to earth female body.

And while she's at it, the enterprising former Winnipegger is turning herself into a North American brand.

After living in Los Angeles for nearly a decade, the exercise expert/entrepreneur -- whose clients include Keanu Reeves, Gabrielle Union and Christina Milian -- has written her first book, *No Gym Required: Unleash Your Inner Rock Star*. In it, she urges people to stop idolizing unusually skinny celebs.

"I don't think that doing 10 squats and having a perfect ass is going to make you happy," Cohen says during a phone interview from Los Angeles. "I deal with people every day who have the hottest bodies in the world. They aren't any happier than the people I train who are 60 pounds overweight."

In her book, Cohen, 33, pushes the often-heard idea that exercisers do not need gyms and can, instead, use personal body weight, the outdoors and common office furniture to exercise. She also offers readers healthy eating tips and reminders that fit bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

Her official Winnipeg book release will happen at 2 p.m. today at McNally Robinson in Polo Park.

Cohen has also launched a set of runners -- branded with her book's title. The shoes, available at Winnipeg's Aviva, have interchangeable weighted insoles she says help the wearer burn extra calories.

As well, Cohen has launched No Gym Required fitness classes that she and top trainers teach in the parks and on the beaches of southern California. There, they turn walking trails, play structures and the sand into gym equipment.

She plans to take her classes to cities around the continent -- perhaps even to Winnipeg, she says.

Last month, she kicked off her No Gym Required Los Angeles meal-delivery service.

Her slick No Gym Required website comes with the catchy, Nike-style catch phrase: "Anytime. Anywhere. No Excuses."

In her book -- the cornerstone of her efforts -- Cohen, makes her message clear: Instead of looking up to the emaciated, silicone-implemented Hollywood-types in magazines, on gossip websites and on television, it's time to set realistic health and weight goals.

"I'm using fitness as a platform for a bigger message, which is be happy with who you are," she says.

Cohen says she wrote her book out of her frustration with the superficiality of Los Angeles, where she spends most of her time. She also lives in Toronto.

She says she wants the public and stars alike to know that people are people regardless of fame status.

"Everyone has the same insecurities and the same doubts and the same lack of motivation to do something," says Cohen. "There's nothing more kooky about (a celebrity's) situation than person X or person Y."

Cohen admits she didn't always possess the ultra-toned body she has now.

When living in Winnipeg, she loved to eat -- especially at Sorrento's on Ellice.

"I was basically average. I was always fairly active, but I wouldn't say that I was extremely fit or hardcore," says Cohen, who considers her body naturally "curvaceous." "I actually worked out to balance out my love for food."

Cohen's foray into the world of fitness was accidental.

The psychology major, who grew up in Garden City, graduated from the University of Manitoba a decade ago and moved to Toronto. She earned a master's degree in sports marketing and ended up in California, where she worked for a record label.

Unhappy with her job, she got her fitness certifications and ended up training up-and-coming musicians at her label.

For a year, she trained former *American Idol* contestant Mycale Guyton.

"It was enough to get my body in amazing shape without having to lift crazy weights," says Guyton, who prefers Cohen's approach to that of her past trainers. "They always had me lifting crazy weights and being in the gym. Jennifer and I would run stairs and do stuff outside."

Now Cohen trains selected clients in Toronto and L.A. She charges upwards of \$150 an hour.

She currently spends most of her time working on her No Gym Required business ventures.

Beverly Hills gym owner Adam Ernster -- who has trained Ben Affleck, Mischa Barton and Nicole Ritchie -- says Cohen has a challenge ahead of her, but possesses the drive to get her common-sense message to the

public.

"I'm knee-deep in these images and the message that the media is sending women these days. It's pretty horrible," says Ernster, who carries Cohen's book at his gym. "If anyone's going to pull this off, it would be (Jennifer). Because she really believes in what she's talking about."


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-- Fitness trainer Jennifer Cohen

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