

## Golden Fitness bulks up local presence

By Richard Lawson

Lexington, Ky.-based Global Fitness Holdings is adding some muscle to the Rivergate area with a large new World Gym Fitness Center, the first in a planned \$10 million expansion in the Nashville area. The 25,000-square-foot club is slated to open in August in Rivergate Station. Global Fitness plans to open four to six locations, investing at least \$10 million, said Glenn Gordon, Global Fitness president. "We are very much on course for that," Gordon said. Strong residential and retail development near RiverGate Mall was a key driver in picking Rivergate for the first new club, according to Ira Blonder, a real estate advisor with The Blonder Group, LLC. He represents Global Fitness in finding new locations. The Rivergate World Gym and future ones will come with a high-tech twist: exercise equipment fitted with the Internet and other personalized entertainment. There are also some high-tech financial perks. "You can earn frequent flier miles for every mile you ride on the bike," Gordon said. Monthly fees probably will be in the \$30-\$40 range. "Normally we don't charge initiation fees," Gordon said. While the concept of surfing the Internet while working out has been around for several years in some other markets, it may be a new phenomenon for the Nashville area. Nashville health clubs such as The Club at Green Hills and the Delta Fitness and Adventure Club in Green Hills don't have the Internet-capable exercise equipment. Entertainment in health clubs such as overhead televisions has become quite popular, said Jerry Janda, editor-in-chief of Philadelphia-based trade magazine *Club Industry*. Internet access and other forms of personalized entertainment haven't become quite as established, he said. "But it's gaining in popularity." Santa Monica, Calif.-based World Gym International, the franchiser for the clubs, doesn't require its franchisees to equip their clubs with the technology. And the franchiser probably won't push its franchisees until having such equipment proves it can attract new members or serve as an advertising and informational vehicle, said Mike Uretz, the franchiser's chief executive officer. "The systems are awfully expensive," he said, noting each system costs roughly a couple thousand dollars, vs. hundreds for many standard kinds of exercise equipment. The Internet access equipment is made by San Francisco-based Netpulse Communications. The equipment also includes a compact disc player. The Rivergate club also will have equipment made by Alberta, Canada-based E-Zone Networks. E-Zone equips cardiovascular machines -- such as bikes and step machines -- with entertainment systems that provide special programming, such as celebrity interviews, movie reviews and Hollywood gossip. Global Fitness, which owns clubs in Lexington and Cincinnati, Ohio, put the E-Zone equipment in its other club on Murfreesboro Road in Antioch within the past couple weeks. The Rivergate club is the first one Global Fitness plans to build in the Nashville area from the ground up with the E-Zone and Netpulse exercise equipment. "The whole intent is to occupy the mind while the body is at work," Gordon said. Global Fitness first came to Nashville in September when it bought into the Murfreesboro World Gym, which was owned by Nashville businessman Eugene Sacks. Sacks, a minority investor in Cummins Station and other Nashville buildings, had bought out his former partner in the club with the help of Global Fitness. The club previously had been named Club Vita. But Sacks and his former partner changed it to World Gym after buying it in 1998. Other World Gym franchises not owned by Global Fitness are located in Hendersonville, Brentwood and Bellevue. Global Fitness officials said it has the new development rights for Nashville. It may try buying out the others. "We're always open to that possibility," Gordon said. "But we don't want to be hostile."