

Local resident achieves virtual fitness reality in one year

By ANN ZAZA

Talk about inspiration! How many of us have made the yearly resolution to lose weight, get into a fitness regime, eat right, and get healthy. In fact, thousands of Canadians enter a new year promising themselves to get into shape and thousands, each year do not succeed.

Gerry Lazar was one of those people-until last year when he made a resolution that stuck. Here he is, one year later, 70 pounds lighter and at age 46, in better shape than he ever was.

"In December 2000 I was extremely unhappy and chronically overweight," said Lazar. "I was determined to lose weight and keep it off and to stay focused."

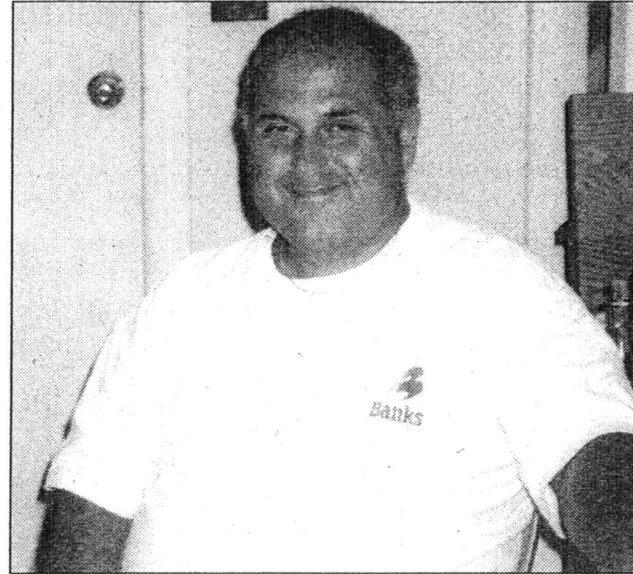
Such is the familiar lament of many of us, especially at this time of year. The difference Lazar says was his introduction to the Canadian Cross Country

Fitness Challenge. It is a program developed by Lee Downer, a professional fitness consultant whose vision is to motivate Canadians to adopt regular fitness activity into their lifestyles.

The program consists of logging on to a website to track your progress across a virtual map of Canada. Participants can build up mileage by running, walking, swimming, biking, rowing or skiing, and plot their course across the country, starting in St. John's Newfoundland and ending up in Vancouver B.C. So far, Lazar has made it as far as Ontario.

"I began my journey in Newfoundland and recorded my mileage faithfully," said Lazar. "I was proud of the day I got off the 'rock' and onto the mainland. Today I am in southern Ontario, almost 4,000 km later and I'm on the way to my hometown, Thunder Bay."

Downer has enlisted the aid of



PHOTOS BY LEE DOWNER

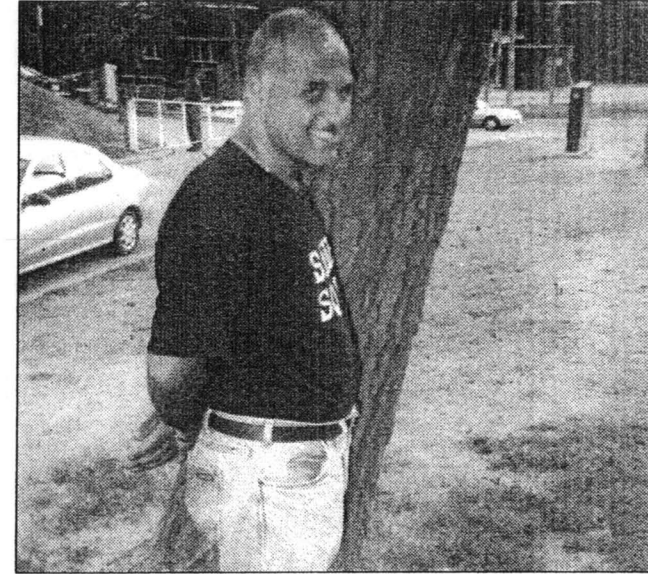
Canadian Olympians to assist with online coaching and to help with motivation. So far, swimming gold medalist Alex Baumann, marathoner Peter Fonseca and double bronze cyclist Clara Hughes are on board and Downer is soliciting others to enlist as well.

Anyone can join the virtual coast-to-coast program. It is a very personal program that is designed to your own particular goals and abilities. It is not a private club and the member-

ship fee is minimal (under \$40) and basically covers the costs of maintaining the Internet site.

I am very seriously considering taking this challenge and charting my own progress throughout the year ahead. If you too are interested, more information is available on the website at www.c2cfrit.com.

Good luck to all those brave enough to join. I hope to see you all on the 'virtual' cross-country road to fitness.



Gerry Lazar one year ago (upper left) at 245 pounds when he first joined the Canadian Cross Country Fitness Challenge. Lazar (above) during the summer, and (below) at 180 pounds today.

