

Pounds still melting for 'Biggest Loser' castoff

By Sara Callender
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Joelle Gwynn just achieved an impressive milestone.

"I'm proud to announce that I recently ran my first mile without stopping," said Gwynn, a Southfield resident. "It probably doesn't seem like a big deal for most people but for someone who has never done it, it's huge."

She has other reasons to be proud too. Gwynn, who trains with Catherine Munaco at Coach Me Fit in West Bloomfield, has whittled off 70 pounds thanks to a healthy diet and rigorous workout regimen that includes running, cardio and weights.

She was ousted in week five during the current season of the TV hit, *The Biggest Loser*, but is still competing at home for the second-place \$100,000 prize, which will be announced on the May 5 finale on NBC.

"I recently went to New York for the Today Show, and I was able to walk around in high heel boots," Gwynn said. "The last time I went to New York, I didn't enjoy it. I had stopped wearing my seat belt because it was a pain to adjust it. I can walk down the aisle of an airplane without turning sideways. I can sit in a booth at a restaurant and wear different clothes ... so many small miracles. I celebrate every little success."

Gwynn has struggled with her weight since she was a youngster.

"I was a big emotional eater," Gwynn said. "I would hold in my anger and pop in a Twinkie instead — my other choice was Snickers."

At 309 pounds, she was 150 pounds overweight and feared only bariatric surgery would help her lose weight. She auditioned three times before landing a spot on the show.

"This was going to be my last (audition)," Gwynn said. "I said a special prayer."

Gwynn, the founder of a nonprofit organization, was in for a shock when she arrived at the show. She exercised at least four hours a day with a trainer, plus another four to six hours on her own.



Southfield resident Joelle Gwynn (right), and her personal trainer Catherine Munaco, owner of Coach Me Fit in West Bloomfield, talk about training for 'The Biggest Loser' finale.

"She was exercising more than an NFL player but without any previous training," Munaco said. "They work up to that level, she didn't."

Gwynn was accused of slacking on the show and lost just six pounds in her first week. She was ousted during week five after dropping a total of 30 pounds.

While some may have given up in disappointment, she chose to use her departure from the show as motivation.

She continued with her workouts immediately after returning and hits the gym for an hour, four or five times a week. She also exercises at home.

Munaco helps her plan nutritious meals and snacks.

"I used to eat pretty healthy — I liked vegetables," Gwynn said. "But I ate out a lot or got fast food. I had to reintroduce myself to a grocery store. It was really the working out part that got me."

That's why Munaco has been a godsend, Gwynn said.

"She just needed consistency," Munaco said. "When you have a (workout) appointment, you have to keep it. You have to be accountable. Any time the whole world knows you're on a diet it can be stressful but you have to be accountable."

Munaco works one-on-one with all her clients to develop a custom diet and exercise plan that works.

"Education is important," Munaco said. "(Gwynn) has a job and a life so some days it's more difficult. So, you have to say, 'OK, maybe I should get up earlier to work out.' And I won't deny anyone a piece of birthday cake. You just have to balance it out."

Gwynn plans to continue her healthy lifestyle regardless of what happens on the show. Her goal weight is "anything under 200 pounds," although Munaco — who will be in Los Angeles with Gwynn for The Biggest Loser finale — is pushing for 165.

"I have to because of my health," Gwynn said. "It's a lifestyle. It's not just physical, it's relevant in other areas of your life because you just feel better."



Joelle Gwynn, of Southfield, said appearing on the popular TV show 'Biggest Loser' was a once in a lifetime experience that taught her to let nothing get in her way from living a more