

# A LOOK INSIDE

> More than 30 years ago, the famed Bev Francis Powerhouse Gym opened its doors. We visited the “East Coast Mecca” and spoke with Steve Weinberger, the man who helped put the hardcore gym on the map.

# THE MECCA



Bev Francis Powerhouse Gym is more than a gym—it’s a legacy of strength, dedication, and hardcore training.

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## EAST COAST MECCA

**F**OR MORE THAN 30 YEARS, Bev Francis Powerhouse Gym—a hardcore gym opened in 1987 and located in Syosset, NY, a hamlet on the North Shore of Long Island—has served as an iron playground for the workout aficionado. The “East Coast Mecca” has quietly usurped Gold’s Venice as bodybuilding’s most renowned training facility, routinely drawing in everyone from aspiring bodybuilders to Mr. Olympia legends such as Jay Cutler and Ronnie Coleman and celebrities such as Dwayne Johnson and Jennifer Lopez.

“I never thought I was going to have this life,” says co-founder and IFBB Pro League head judge Steve Weinberger. “I thought I was going to be delivering newspapers for the *New York Post* for the rest of my life.”

But in 1983, Weinberger had a chance encounter with Australian powerlifter and bodybuilder Bev Francis. She was filming *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, a follow-up to the popular 1977 documentary *Pumping Iron*, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Weinberger was hired to show her around New York.

The film helped raise Bev’s profile in the industry and led to the pair transitioning into a business partnership and, eventually, a marriage with two children.

A lot has changed in 30-plus years—the 5,000-square-foot space has expanded to more than 30,000 square feet, the pair have since separated but remain closer than ever, Steve became head judge of the IFBB Pro League—but one thing has stayed consistent: The mecca of bodybuilding has migrated east, and its name is Bev Francis Powerhouse Gym.



Clockwise from top left: Steve in the gym’s posing studio; Steve and Lou Ferrigno; Steve in his office; Steve and Bev hitting a most-muscular pose; the entrance to the “East Coast Mecca.”



### Keeping the Doors Open

I’d work for the *New York Post* at night, and during the day I’d be in the gym. Bev would be in the gym all day training clients. Then I’d go to sleep after work at the *Post*, wake up, and go to the gym.

### Finding Success

The gym was a hit with the women, believe it or not. We had hardcore women; there were not that many men in the beginning because of Bev’s name. So in a way it was like, “I don’t know if this is such a great idea.” We had a koala bear as our logo doing a squat, and then we switched over to our Powerhouse.

### Picking the Perfect Spot

We originally looked in Manhattan, but rents were absurd. We didn’t want to be on the second floor or in a basement—we wanted the ground floor. Then we came out to Long Island, and we found a little warehouse that was about 5,000 square feet. I took out a home equity loan, and we opened up the gym.



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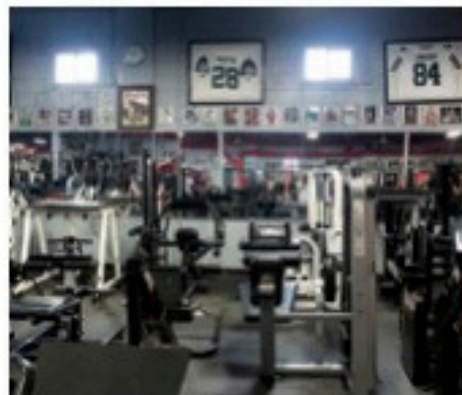
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### Jack of All Gyms

I'd like to think that people think of the gym as a good hardcore gym—a serious gym that you go to for a good workout. Some gyms are known for parts—like, this gym might be known for legs, and this gym might be known for chest—but I'd like to be known for everything. The big gym chains, they don't want the hardcore people. We take all the misfits. Misfits are welcome here.

### Where Legends Train

There are so many world champions and great lifters and athletes [who train or have trained here] that I think there's a little more respect. [People] know that they can't get away with [dis-respect] here. And if they do try, we check them.



### Home Is Where the Gym Is

I've been approached by plenty of people to franchise the gym, and the answer is always "No, thank you." This is our home. We don't want a gym in Brooklyn, the Bronx, or New Jersey. I live a very comfortable life here. I'm not looking to be the richest man in the cemetery.

COURTESY OF STEVE WEINBERG



### Keeping Bev's on Top

I don't want the gym to look or feel dated in any way or at any time. I want it to be as near-perfect as it can be—smooth like a fine clock. I want it to tick all the time, perfectly. Nothing does, but I want to get it as perfect as I possibly can.



### On Judging Fair and Square

I'm so cautious and mindful of [not playing favorites]. When I judge, I am judging the body, not the fact that I know the guy or I dislike him or I like him. I couldn't care if I hated him or if I loved him like a brother. I'm going to judge him the way he is. That's what I've always done, and that's what I will always do. There are plenty of people that I dislike that I put in first place and there are plenty of people that I really have a lot of respect for that I like that I put in 16th place. **MMA**



Steve and Bev with six-time Mr. Olympia winner Dorian Yates, who would routinely visit the gym while overseas.



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