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CREDIT: JASON JOYCE

# ISTHMUS | THE DAILY PAGE

Wednesday, October 16, 2013 | Madison, WI: 51.0° F

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### RECREATION

#### The November Project takes a playful approach to working out

*Fitness flash mob*

[Carrie Anton](#) on Thursday 09/12/2013

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At 6:40 a.m., 105 fitness-seekers are running, backwards, in lines of six, around the Capitol. The first runner in each line sprints backward to the end of the line, taking the place of the last runner. This is repeated as many times as possible in the time it takes for the group to return to where the fun first began, at the corner of Mifflin and Carroll.

Onlookers, including bus drivers, early-morning commuters, police officers and tourists, snap photos as if witnessing some sort of fitness freak show. But for the members of the [November Project's Madison chapter](#) (or "tribe," as it's often called), this is just another Friday.

"Getting people out of their comfort zones and into childlike playful moods in the morning is so fun for me," says the leader of this self-proclaimed ragtag group, Dan Graham. "Sometimes I wish I wasn't in charge so I could just play, too."

While Graham heads the Madison group, his brother and a friend were behind the [November Project](#) idea. Almost two years ago, Brogan Graham and Bojan Manderic, both ex-college athletes living in Boston, wanted to help each other stay in shape, so they set a goal to work out every morning of November -- hence the name. They invited friends to join, and before long the November Project boomed into a free fitness flash mob with regular group workouts held every week.

Graham, who was taking classes at Madison College but feeling the cabin fever of Wisconsin winters,

Members of the 'tribe' push each other through DIY health lunacy.

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was finally convinced by his brother and Manderic to start the second chapter. "I called two friends of mine, both athletic girls who I thought were probably goofy enough to meet me during the coldest part of the winter to run some hills," he says.

He's referring to the hill -- Bascom Hill, which is now the regular Wednesday meeting spot, right at the feet of Abe Lincoln.

**The November Project has evolved from its cold start** into a warm, welcoming event where everyone is invited to participate. And while Graham weaves in fun as a regular part of the equation, don't expect an easy workout.

"It's f-ing hard," says Jeff Mack, a member since June.

Mack, like many of the participants, learned about the group through Facebook. Wanting to get in shape to keep up with his kids, he decided to give it a try. "It's cool because it involves people from all different walks of life in Madison, and working out with a group that pushes you."

The concept of community fitness is not new. CrossFit "boxes" and bootcamps with similar workouts and social bonding are popping up all over Dane County. But one thing that makes the November Project unique is that it's free.

"The November Project means I don't have to pay that gym membership and dread every day that I will have to run on a treadmill by myself through the cold Wisconsin winter," says Gabby Waclawik, who joined the tribe last February despite single-digit temps. "November Project gets me out of bed in the morning, to see everyone's smiling face, to hug it out after a tough workout."

She's not kidding about the hug. The Wednesday and Friday gatherings start with a group introduction of all the newbies and end with sweaty hugs. With them come laughter, a lot of love, and a great community that makes participants feel good about doing it all over a few days later.

The group started as three and has grown to 105 (the largest turnout ever) in just seven months. Could the November Project get too big?

"Nearly every week we are getting to a new biggest number, and at some point the logistics of the whole thing, communication and organization to the masses, becomes trickier," says Graham. "But as far as this idea of 'too big,' I just don't see it getting there. I have a long list of ideas of what we can do with bigger groups, and as long as the people who come are happy and positive, there's no reason we all can't figure out a way to work hard around each other."

Newcomers to the November Project workout are welcome any Wednesday or Friday throughout the year. Wednesday workouts start at the Lincoln statue atop Bascom Hill at 6:29 a.m., and Friday workouts start at the Capitol's State Street entrance at the same time. For more information see [facebook.com/NovemberProjectMadison](https://facebook.com/NovemberProjectMadison).

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