

## Fit Families scale new heights

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Healthy Weight Journal 4 Fit Family Challenge participants met Saturday, March 29 to tackle the rock climbing wall in the Physical Education Instructional Facility at Northern Michigan University. Amid the echoing din of excited voices and athletic shoe squeaks from a basketball practice in the gym the climbing wall shares, the two Healthy Weight families took on "something completely different." PEIF climbing instructors Ben Maher and Nicole Hitchings gave the eight participants some brief safety and how-to direction, then helped them into their climbing harnesses. The harnesses are comprised of leg and waist straps, similar to a parachute hitch, that provide a seat of sorts, with a loop at the abdomen where a hoist/guide rope is attached.

The rope runs from the climber to a pulley on a bar at the top of the wall, then back down to the hands of the climbing assistant. That staff member then pulls the rope taut as the climber moves from one foot- and handhold to the next, following "trails" indicated by pieces of tape in different colors and shapes. The rope tender also serves as the safety element to prevent a climber from falling.

Wall climbing is demanding physically, as evidenced by the rock hard forearm muscles and shaking Michele Thomas experienced after her climb.

"I think it was very successful," she said. "I didn't think about the rope, just looked up and down (to stay oriented) and kept climbing." Maher said the wall is very versatile.

"We can change the holds and make different routes to change up the difficulty. It's fun to see how much more people are using the wall lately, and fun to see people try harder and harder routes."

Oldest to youngest, all tackled the wall — most more than once.

The next group outing will be a GPS training/geocache hike on Saturday, April 5.