**About Vanessa Santiago**

Vanessa was born and raised in the beautiful seaside city of Ponce, Puerto Rico. She began her journey into the world of fitness and wellbeing at an early age, after seeing how a lack of exercise and a family history of diabetes took a toll on her immediate relatives—not only deteriorating their quality of life but ending her grandparents’ lives at an early age.

“Lack of education was a huge part of the problem in my family,” said Vanessa. “So I started reading everything I could get my hands on and began a running group for my neighbors to get us all in shape.” She traded the traditional *quinceañera* dress for her first bench press set at 15, then got her first job at 16 working at a gym.

As she grew older, she focused on her desire to help people by teaching them how to eat, how to exercise and how to use the natural remedies she grew up with on the island—call it a mixture of Caribbean meets West. While in Puerto Rico, Vanessa completed her Bachelors Degree in Physical Education and a Bachelors Degree in Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Puerto Rico. Always in search of more, she left the Island for Scottsdale, Arizona, and completed her Masters Degree in Public Health with an emphasis in Community Education and Health Promotion at Walden University. Vanessa is also a certified personal trainer and certified group exercise instructor, which qualifies her to teach pre- and post-natal exercise classes, water aerobics,Silver Sneakers programs, Zumba, Bootcamp and BOSU.

A staunch supported of the Latino community, Vanessa collaborated with ASU Health and Science Department on implementing the very first Fit and Strong Program in Arizona targeting this segment of the population. As the Exercise and Wellness instructor for the program, which targeted older adults with ostheoarthritis, she was responsible for significant functional and physical activity improvements for senior Latinos.

Vanessa has also offered her health coaching and group exercise services to organizations such as

Basha’s and Food City, Unisource, People of Color Network, Chas Roberts, Suntec Concrete, Maricopa

Community Colleges, Pure Fitness, L.A. Fitness and Mountain Side Fitness. Her latest project—*Latinas Run, Too!—*is currently underway, where she’s encouraging Latin women in Phoenix to become aware of the most common illnesses affecting their ethnic profile. Her motto? Being healthy is just a step away!

On a personal note, Vanessa is the mother of two active girls and an accomplished salsa dancer.

Ready to have fun and get fit? You’ve come to the right place!