

# Wellness on the Rideau marks first decade



## Behind the Bottom Line

Iris Winston  
SPECIAL TO THE OBI

WELLNESS ON THE RIDEAU has just chalked up its first decade, a mark of outstanding fitness in a volatile industry.

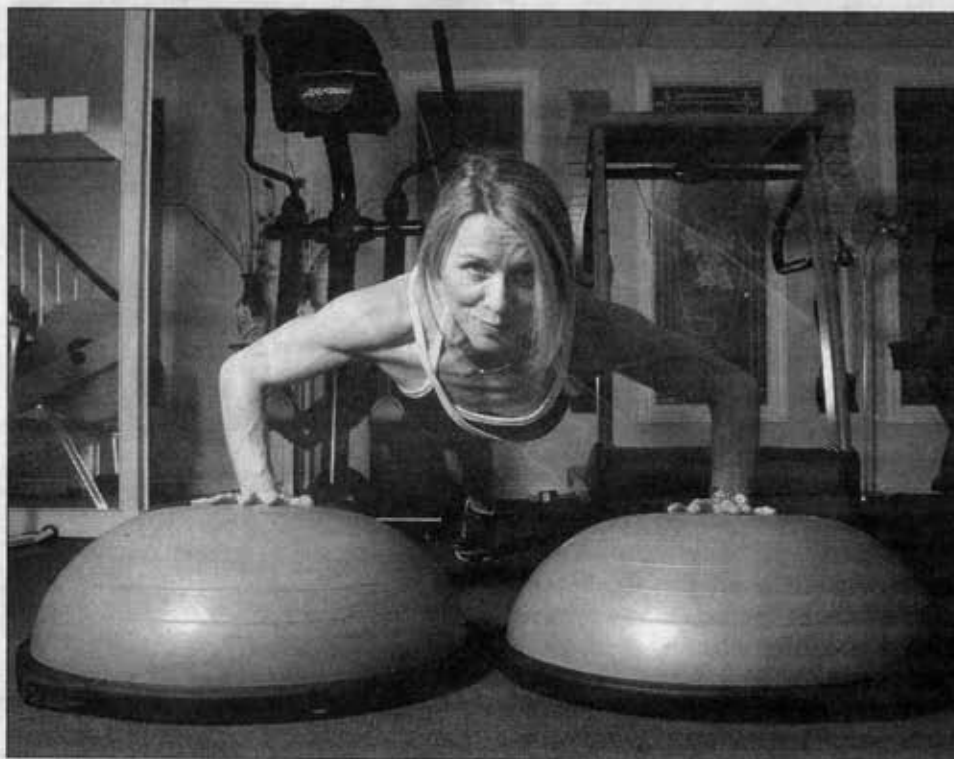
Owner Elaine Giacobbi, who has been in the fitness business for 25 years, opened Ottawa's first women-only fitness studio in 1998 and has operated the upscale facility from her home on the Rideau River ever since.

"We're a small team who really enjoys working with women and giving women the special service they're looking for," says Ms. Giacobbi, whose long list of fitness qualifications include personal training and aerobics certification, along with a black belt in karate. "We understand what women go through and know that they tend to take better care of their families, their houses and their automobiles than they do of themselves.

"When they come here, we put them at the top of the list instead of the bottom."

Key factors in this niche market, she adds, are the one-on-one personal training from certified female instructors, the provision of supplies such as bottled water, towels, even shoes and shirts, and the attractive, waterfront setting of the well-equipped studios.

"The idea is to eliminate stress," emphasizes Ms. Giacobbi, pointing out that the



Elaine Giacobbi, owner of Wellness on the Rideau, which opened in 1998. Photo by Elenise Ranger

hour-long sessions in the two studios are booked at different half-hours to ensure that each client has 30 minutes to shower and change in private.

"No one needs to rush. We have parking at the door, a private entrance, a private studio and the client has a full hour to work out and talk privately with the trainer about her needs."

Other businesses tackling the burgeoning personal training industry in town include CUFit Personal Training, Snap Fitness and Feel'n Fine,

While customized fitness programs are devised according to each person's body type, health, time, budget and personal goals, she says each regimen includes a number of common factors. "We're here to motivate and help people to learn proper techniques and safety in exercise. I want injury-free women, not weekend warriors with sore joints.

"So we teach a lot of stretching, good warm-up and cool-down procedures and touch on everything that's important in the workout structure, including teaching women how to modify their exercise program when they're not feeling great. The secret of success is prioritizing and having a good program."

Ideally, she says, she recommends three one-hour sessions a week at Wellness on the

Rideau, to reach short-term fitness goals in an average of three months. "But depending on the particular situation, it may take longer," she says, emphasizing the importance of setting reasonable goals, learning good exercise habits and, most of all enjoying the experience.

"This is something that you can stay in for the rest of your life," she says. "I have clients who have been with me for years. Some people have attained their goals but stay with me because they feel motivated and inspired to keep going. That's what my trainers and I try to do – and I have some great trainers at Wellness on the Rideau.

"As a group, we try to keep people inspired, not just for three or six months, but for life. This is all about a journey to a healthy lifestyle."

Operating a home-based business that combines her lifelong passion for fitness and allows her to be with her seven-year-old son, Jacob, is the realization of a dream, says the former federal public servant.

"It's a blessing to be home doing what you are really passionate about while raising a family and working around family obligations," says Ms. Giacobbi, who ran a karate studio with a partner for five years before setting up her home-based business.

Ms. Giacobbi credits her husband, Denis, also a fitness expert, with the design and decor of the sound-proof, mirrored studios on the lower level of their home. The Giacobbis co-own Executive Fitness Leaders, which operates from two locations in the city under Mr. Giacobbi's watchful eye.

"There is a bit of crossover," says Ms. Giacobbi.

"I support his business 100-per-

cent. For instance, I encourage my clients here to use the massage facilities at Executive Fitness Leaders."

"I love being in this industry, not just because it's my job, but also because I can help people," says Ms. Giacobbi. "We want the women who come here to enjoy their time, have the best equipment available and feel as though they are visiting a friend." ■

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