

STOTT PILATES®

A Canadian Success Story

By Kay Stevenson

When Lindsay and Moira Merrithew first embarked on this journey together, they had no idea that almost two decades later they'd be running such a successful international Pilates organization.

Lindsay was attending the prestigious Juilliard School in New York and pursuing his acting career. Moira was a professional dancer when a foot injury forced her to hang up her pointe shoes in the early 1980s. Shortly thereafter, she was introduced to Pilates and later studied under Romana Kryzanowska, one of Joseph Pilates' protégés.

Moira started teaching Pilates after returning from New York. The couple set up shop in their cramped one-bedroom apartment. Lindsay constructed Moira's first piece of studio equipment called a "Reformer" out of sheer necessity. Pilates was very much a cottage industry at the time and access to equipment was very limited. This machine was at first constructed out of wood, but soon Lindsay decided to design one made out of metal in order to accommodate adjustability issues among clients with differing needs.

FROM THE BEGINNING

Pilates was still a relatively unknown method of exercise when they first opened their Toronto studio back in 1987. It was Lindsay's perseverance and determination that managed to land Moira her first ten clients, including ballerina Karen Kain. Overnight, that number jumped to 80 after *Toronto Life Fashion* published a story on Kain's use of the regimen.

The new technology made waves in the marketplace. The decision to form a business came from the notion of wanting to create a more modern looking and functioning Pilates Reformer. "We thought of creating a Reformer that had adjustability to suit the user and was both ergonomically and esthetically appealing," explains

Lindsay. "We wanted to build a better 'mousetrap.'"

In 1992, Lindsay and Moira decided to showcase their creation to the Pilates community in Los Angeles. They divided the unit into smaller pieces so it would cost less to send across the border and invited people to view the signature piece in their hotel suite. "I think we had 75 to 100 people come through," recalls Lindsay, "and it seemed like, bang, all of a sudden we had a huge interest." Though not all of their industry affiliates liked what they had done with the original model, Lindsay says the reaction was one of both amazement and curiosity with the new design. Much to their delight, the purchase orders started flying in. Lindsay describes the visit to Los Angeles as "a magical moment" – a definite turning point in the STOTT PILATES story.

The following year the company started manufacturing Reformers on a



large scale and in 1995 incorporated a brand new line of equipment establishing STOTT PILATES Equipment. They now have five variations of the original model being sold in the commercial fitness world.

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STOTT PILATES® Photography © Merrithew Corporation

METHOD OF EXERCISE FOR A LIFETIME

The public's approach to health and fitness was changing. People were becoming more in tune with their bodies. Fitness instructors and gym owners were recognizing their clients' needs for toned physiques, injury prevention, increased strength, stress management, conditioning for athletic skills, rehab and exercises that facilitated the mind-body connection.

This contemporary form of exercise was beneficial for people of all ages, fitness abilities and levels, and could be adapted to enhance anyone's current train-

ing routine. Today, Pilates also appeals to competitive teens who want to build core strength, athletes who want to prevent or attend to injuries and older adults who simply want to make getting out of bed easier. "In order to strengthen the body, smaller movements are effective," explains Moira. "You have to work the inner mechanism first and then the larger outside muscles – always remember that you don't have to hurt to get results."

With this in mind, the Merrithews have taken steps to dispel the myth that Pilates is only for women. "Many pro athletes are incorporating Pilates into their

conditioning regimens today, and the majority of these athletes are men," explains Lindsay. "These are guys who go through intense training for their sport. Perhaps they are introduced to it while on the mend from injury, but most are sticking with it throughout the season and I think we're going to see a lot more men in the future seek the benefits of Pilates."

A LEADER IN THE INDUSTRY

STOTT PILATES® today is a Canadian-based company still run by Lindsay and Moira Merrithew. As co-founders of the organization, they have their respec-



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tive roles and complimentary skills. Lindsay is President and CEO. Moira is Executive Director, Education and Master Instructor Trainer.

Lindsay has been the driving force behind the growth of Merrithew Corporation and its premier brand, STOTT PILATES® since the beginning. He was nominated twice for Ernst & Young’s Entrepreneur Of The Year® award and is a five-time recipient of *PROFIT* magazine’s 100 Fastest-Growing Companies award. In addition to directing and growing the fully integrated business from a visionary and strategic point-of-view, he has been instrumental in designing, producing and marketing the company’s extensive equipment and video lines. He is a member of Ontario’s prestigious Innovators Alliance for elite entrepreneurs, and is consulted regularly by the trade and business media. He holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree from Dalhousie University and is a graduate of the Juilliard School of Performing Arts in New York City.

Moira is responsible for the development of the STOTT PILATES® exercise method. After an accomplished career as principal dancer with the City Ballet of Toronto and the Atlantic Ballet Company, she went on to retrain and certify as a Pilates instructor under the tutelage of Romana Kryzanowska at the original studio founded by the late Joseph H. Pilates. In addition to creating the curricula and support materials for the STOTT PILATES education & certification programs, Moira is the content creator and featured performer in the STOTT PILATES video series. She has also found time to train such high profile athletes as former Toronto Maple Leaf

goalie Ed Belfour, tennis great Martina Navratilova and ballet icon Karen Kain.

With over 125 staff between head office and the manufacturing plant, over 15,000 trained instructors in 67 countries, 50 Licensed Training Centres and two corporately owned facilities, one in Toronto and one in New York City, the company is frequently touted as the professional’s choice.

INNOVATION AND EDUCATION

A neck injury prompted Moira to become more in tune with her body and soon the couple was making a connection with the rehab world. To keep up with modern medicine and physiotherapy as a whole, they worked with numerous physical therapists, sports medicine professionals and fitness professionals to evolve the original method. Today STOTT PILATES is a contemporary, anatomically-based approach with a combination of key medical research and a modern day knowledge of biomechanics.

Lindsay says the mainstream fitness industry is what ultimately brought Pilates into the public’s eye, which in turn gave them the opportunity to refine and contemporize the method to make it more effective – and take the next steps toward new pieces of equipment innovation.

Much of the Merrithew’s success can be attributed to their individual contributions and to their staff: quality instructors, licensed training centres, fitness affiliates and dedicated employees. “I admire and respect Lindsay and Moira, not only for what they have accomplished by building STOTT PILATES into one of the leading Pilates companies in the world, but for what I believe to be their principles and ideals. I

have a high regard for their personal integrity and find them to be a class act even though we are fierce competitors.” Julie Lobdell Founder and CEO, Peak Pilates

The education division designs customized training and certification courses for fitness instructors and for individuals. The commercial division manufactures a wide variety of fitness equipment to support these exercise programs. Ultimately, education and equipment go hand in hand to make it all work.

Another key aspect to the success of the company is the decision to maintain strong relationships with the people using their programming and equipment – and to create profitable career paths for instructors. Their emphasis is on creating a sense of community. According to industry leader and chief executive officer for IDEA Health & Fitness Association, Peter Davis, “... the fitness and Pilates industries are very fortunate to have two such strong contributors to inspire the world to fitness and wellness.” He says Moira and Lindsay have the perfect combination of creativity, passion, business savvy and leadership which is unusual to find in a husband and wife team. “They are not only wonderful business executives, but also extraordinary parents and quality people.”

ONE SOURCE – MULTIPLE SOLUTIONS

According to the 2007 IDEA Fitness Programs and Equipment Survey, 68 percent of facilities surveyed have Pilates as one of their program offerings. This is a 49 percent increase compared to when IDEA first started tracking Pilates back in 1999. To help fitness facilities develop their own successful Pilates businesses, Lindsay decided to hire top industry professionals to lead their Full Solutions Division. The Full Solutions team offers club owners expert consulting and business development opportunities – from staffing, education, studio equipment needs, timeline proposals, studio operations, marketing and on-going support. Creating more opportunities for facilities to increase revenue and instructors to advance their careers is very gratifying to them.

Today, more and more physical therapists, rehab patients, baby boomers, celebrities, pro athletes and regular fitness enthusiasts are recognizing the benefits of Pilates. The Merrithews and their STOTT PILATES team, through all of their efforts over the years, have contributed to this realization and have earned the respect of a grateful industry. FBC

For more information visit www.stottpilates.com.