



## Building an Industry

They started STOTT PILATES® nearly 20 years ago, before anyone guessed what a sensation the exercise would create.

“We didn’t get into this because we thought Pilates would be a big business,” remembers Moira Merrithew, executive director of education for STOTT PILATES, who co-founded the company with her husband, Lindsay G. Merrithew, president and chief executive officer. “In 1988, we were at the right place at the right time. When we started, Pilates was very much a cottage industry. Our goal was simple—to make Pilates as accessible as possible.”

Recalls Lindsay, “There were indicators that people, especially Baby Boomers, were moving toward more mindful forms of exercise, and Pilates is a thoughtful form of exercise that’s all about body awareness.”

Lindsay holds a bachelor of commerce degree from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and is a graduate of the Juilliard School of Performing Arts in New York City. Moira is a former principal dancer with the City Ballet of Toronto and the Atlantic Ballet Company. After an injury, Moira became certified as a Pilates instructor by Romana Kryzanowska at the original studio founded by the late Joseph H. Pilates.

Today Moira oversees the programming component for the STOTT PILATES education and certification division and is one of the featured performers in the STOTT PILATES video series, along with other master instructor trainers. Lindsay directs the growth of the Merrithew Corporation and its premier brand, STOTT PILATES, and is instrumental in designing, producing and marketing the company’s extensive equipment and video lines, including more

than 120 videos for professional and retail consumer markets. STOTT PILATES has over 125 employees, corporate studios in Toronto and New York, and 50 licensed training centers in 19 countries.

In order to keep up with modern medicine and physiotherapy as a whole, Lindsay and Moira worked with numerous physical therapists, sports medicine professionals and fitness professionals to evolve the original method. Today STOTT PILATES offers a contemporary, anatomically based approach that is founded on a combination of key medical research and modern-day knowledge of biomechanics.

“Initially, access to Pilates equipment was very limited. We wanted to make equipment that would adjust to people’s needs, so we used metal instead of wood and added more versatility and user specificity,” explains Lindsay. “We created a reformer that had adjustability to suit the user and that was both ergonomically and aesthetically appealing.”

Innovation continues to be a guiding principle for STOTT PILATES, which recently introduced the V2 Max Plus™, a functional new reformer with a vertical frame and a retractable rope pulley system that enables more rotation and overhead movement, allowing for a more diverse workout by a wider clientele.

“We embrace what is new and exciting because we think this form of exercise has so much potential for the future,” says Lindsay. “We want to continue to make Pilates more functional, and more accessible to everyone, including men, kids and

teens, athletes and sports participants.”

Education and certification are central to their business model: the company has trained in excess of 15,000 instructors worldwide and has a goal to train 32,000 by 2010. “It’s important to empower instructors and give them the tools they need to make decisions that match the right exercisers for every individual,” says Lindsay.

Lindsay feels that for the company, and the fitness industry as a whole, adding value to the professional lives of instructors and developing their career paths are the biggest challenge and the greatest opportunity. As part of that effort, STOTT PILATES assists health clubs in growing and managing successful, revenue-generating Pilates programs.

Moira and Lindsay believe their success is just one example of the tremendous opportunity that exists in the wellness arena today. They encourage professionals to take advantage of opportunities, be passionate about their work, innovate, and create their own success stories. “The industry has changed so much from when there were mostly part-time jobs in fitness,” says Lindsay, “There’s a lot of room to make a difference, because this isn’t a seasoned industry. It’s young. There are so many chapters still to be written, and everyone can be an author.”

*Mary Monroe is a freelance writer in Los Angeles.*

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