

By Jeff Vircoe

A Kelowna woman's business is in excellent shape — even without the customary big budget advertising binges.

Team Fitness Inc., a personal training and health management business, is a success more due to word of mouth than ads, says the company's owner.

Liz Sage, 46, is a single mother of two. She has taken a degree in exercise science from York University and turned it into a thriving business. After years of managing fitness centres and offering personal training in gyms and centres in Kelowna and in eastern Canada, Sage decided to move into her own studio setting 17 months ago.

It was (pardon the pun) a healthy move for sure.

"We've had a phenomenal retention rate with our clients," she says. It's way above industry standards. We've grown more than 30 per in first year in the studio setting."

Fresh off a nomination for Personal Fitness Trainer of the Year from British Columbia Parks and Recreation, Sage and her staff of four trainers have their hands filled with helping clients of all shapes, ages and sizes reach their fitness and accompanying lifestyle goals.

Since arriving in Kelowna in 1994, Sage has been active in improving the lives of many of the city's residents. Initially she spent a lot of time working with ICBC customers recovering from accidents — return to work exercise therapy. She was offered the chance to work with an ICBC pilot project along those lines helping people who, after an accident, would go to medical treatment plans, massage therapy, physio therapy.

"There was so much work to do that when the pilot project was cancelled, I ended up starting my own company. I had developed a good reputation within the medical community here. Team Fitness is a continuum of that process."

Prices for one on one fitness assessment and training run from \$35 to \$65 per session. If there are more than one person in a session, the rates drop.

As for today's demographics, they run the gamut from teens to senior citizens.

"We see young, 15-year-old kids to our oldest client, who is 76 years of age," she says.

The majority of her clients are however the baby boomers in the 38-60 years age bracket. "They're doing the Freedom 55 thing, they have all this disposable income but they don't have the body to go out and play, the bodies to retire with."

Couples come, so do entire families. The numbers also show about

65 per cent female compared to 35 per cent male.

"It (the male female ratio) used to be other way around — until we moved into the private studio setting. Women became more comfortable with the intimate, private setting. For a lot of people the larger gyms a lot more intimidating. Our studio is not a public fitness centre — it's all one-on-one."

When chatting with Sage, one quickly comes to understand that fitness in her realm of the word is not about burly men with hairy backs in one piece weight lifter suits. Fitness these days is complicated, precise and flexible.

"We're more often than not talking lifestyle behaviour rather than fitness," says Sage.

She and her staff — Pam Cote, Lynn Johnson and Shannon O'Gorman — spend a lot of time getting to know each of their clients, whether they're a one session per week person or a four-plus sessions per week fitness fanatic.

"It's about a lot of things other than exercise," says Sage, citing stress levels, dietary planning and assessments, inner motivation, obstacles and barriers, etc.

"We try to get people to pay attention to what other behaviors are sabotaging their life. We get pretty nosy," she says with a laugh, adding "but we do it in a way that shows we really care that they take accountability for their fitness."

"We spend the first few visits doing everything from posture assessment to cardio assessments," she says. "We talk about what are your main objectives and goals — what made you come and talk to us?"

In Team Fitness' 1,700 square foot facility, you'll find all the usual fitness centre amenities — locker rooms, showers and change facilities. And of course they're fully stocked with all the top rated equipment — weights, all the cardio equipment like treadmills, trainers and bikes and for general fitness "we have every imaginable piece of equipment you going to need."

But again, this is about personalized fitness training, where everyone needs and receives special individual care.

"We don't tend to put our full time clients on the large fitness centre machines (leg press leg extensions, chest press machines etc). Instead we use functional trainers such as table machines, free weights, stability balls, exercise boards, balance boards. It's all progressively done."

"I love what I do, and I very much think that it matters. I have fun doing it, and we impact a lot of lives. We really like to see people change their lifestyles. That means going beyond the work out. This affects the rest of their lives."

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