

ST. LOUIS

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## SHE'S THE ONE

by Alicia McColl

As the saying goes, There are some people who lie awake all night dreaming about what they want to do, and there are others who stay awake all night working to make their dreams come true.

Meet the latter. In fact, you could more accurately say that she worked out on the way to realizing her dream. Back in 1999, at age 32, Cindy Brenneke decided to make a few changes in her daily routine. Twelve weeks later she was on the road to a new life and career and less than a year away from opening She's The One Fitness spa for Women, a 16,000 square-foot fitness center, juicebar and cafe in the heart of St. Louis' downtown business district.

Tucked away neatly below street level at 727 Olive St., the women-only fitness center includes a main workout floor with free-weights and Nautilus-type equipment, cardio machines, aerobic and self-defense classes, steam room and jacuzzi, massage therapy, plus a cafe with a healthy food and beverage menu. Each member gets personalized training and nutrition advice upon joining. Results are tracked on paper. Her facility, which operates with just under 10 employees (if you don't count Seagraves the resident Dalmatian), caters mostly to working women within a few block radius. Brenneke

is quick to add that men are certainly welcome to dine in the cafe.

The slim, obviously fit, red-haired owner was not always health conscious, however. Brenneke worked for seven years as a production manager for a local advertising and design agency. "I was making more money than I ever thought was possible," said Brenneke. "I had a nice house, an expensive vehicle, a sizable 401k and a lifestyle that was heading toward self destruction.

"My life was work, party, work, most of the time without much sleep in between. I was drinking seven days a week. Breakfast was a bagel and cappuccino, lunch was fast food, if anything, and dinner was generally happy hour appetizers, which of course consisted of too many fried foods and generally nothing healthy."

A friend told her about Bill Phillips and The Body for Life Challenge, a 12-week regimen of diet, exercise and lifestyle changes, that if followed, can produce dramatic results. With a friend, Brenneke took the challenge, working out at Gold's Gym before work, going to bed at 9 p.m. instead of midnight, eliminating drinking and fried foods and generally eating much healthier. A before and after picture Brenneke keeps at She's The One is proof of her hard work to a better body.

"I had my own blender set up in the company break room, made protein shakes for breakfast and mid-afternoon snacks, kept protein bars at my desk and under the front seat of my car, fell in love with salads and other healthy foods and banned all fried foods and bad carbs from my regular eating habits, except for Saturday when I would treat myself to beer or mixed drinks and fried onion rings or calamari, my favorite," Brenneke confessed. "I was amazed at how good I felt. Co-workers and friends were soon commenting on my energy level. I was getting up at 5 a.m. to work out for an hour every morning, yet had more energy than ever."

Brenneke said it took about a week or so to get used to her new time schedule. "I was never a morning person. I would rather work second or third shift just so I did not have to drag myself out of bed in the morning. But after about a week or so of working out, I loved mornings! And of course, it was always the same 10-15 people in the gym at the same time, so if you missed a day, you could expect to get grief the next day."

By the time Brenneke was 33 she was in the best shape of her life and had grown spiritually and emotionally as well. "I wanted to help others feel as good about

themselves as I felt about myself. Co-workers and friends would ask for my advice on working out and eating, and I would try to help them," Brenneke said. "But this wasn't enough. I wanted to share my experience on a larger scale. I wanted everyone to feel good. I wanted everyone to realize they had the power to change, no matter how bad things were."

She found herself in a role where she could really make a difference in people's lives. It turned into a passion and from that, the concept of She's The One was born. Brenneke would offer a club where women could feel comfortable working out and discussing their health concerns. She would operate the club during the week from Monday through Friday and encourage women to gain a little "me" time, whether it be before or after work or on their lunch hour. And with having a cafe on site, they could grab a healthy sandwich or salad to go after they worked out.

She sincerely believes that every person is in control of his or her life and everyone can take steps to change. "Often we find ourselves spiralling out of control, and we forget that this is our life, we do have control, all we have to do is take it! We find ourselves in situations which become 'normal' — whether it be a bad relationship, being 100 lbs. overweight or stuck in a bad career.

"I was in an abusive relationship for over a year. I actually began to think it was normal for boyfriends to abuse their girlfriends," said Brenneke. "When I was drinking nightly, I also convinced myself that this was normal. Stop. Look at yourself. Are you treating yourself the way you deserve to be treated? Are others treating you the way you deserve to be treated?"

Brenneke grew up on a small farm in Toas, Missouri, outside Jefferson City. Her senior year of high school, a shop teacher persuaded her to go to college, become a teacher. "Coming from a long family of farmers, and with my parents having five kids, college was not something they could or would conceive of. So they told me if I insisted upon going, I would have to pay for it myself," she said.

After graduating from Northeast Missouri State, supporting herself and paying for college by waitressing, delivering pizza and bartending, she moved to New Jersey with her boyfriend. Her degree was in Industrial Science Education but Brenneke soon found out teachers were not being paid what they were worth. She used her graphic design skills to land a job working production prepress for design firms. At age 25, after a divorce and a wish



to "live the American dream," she moved back to St. Louis and quickly landed a lucrative position as a production manager.

It was an experience, she said, that helped her become who she is today.

Brenneke's philosophy is simple. "Everything happens for a reason. When something happens that I don't think should have, I just need to stop and think about it. Why did this happen?"

And when she needs to refuel physically and emotionally, instead of falling back on bad habits, Brenneke said she'll teach an aerobics class to get the endorphins going. She now teaches 15 classes per week. She said the biggest boost she can get is seeing members feel better about themselves. Not surprisingly, she credits her members as being her biggest support.

"Some of these ladies have been coming on a daily basis since the gym opened its doors. I would do anything to help them, and many would do the same for me. We often brainstorm on what we can do to make the gym a better place," Brenneke said. Because most of her potential membership is within walking distance, she goes door-to-door to businesses in the area, handing out information on the club.

Individual memberships are \$49 per month if you choose a month-to-month option and \$39 per month if you sign a one-year contract. There is a \$99 initiation fee.

Senior citizens are offered a discount.

The year 2002 saw a decline in membership, in fact, the lowest ever. Several businesses around the club closed their doors or reduced employees. This year, though, Brenneke is regaining members and hopes for a solid year.

"I keep telling myself tough times don't last, tough people do," she said.

Opening the doors of She's The One came after a humbling financial experience. "I spent much time crunching numbers, convinced I had it all figured out," said Brenneke. "But as every business owner will tell you, double whatever you think it is going to cost and double the amount of time you think it will take."

Her greatest inspiration is local entrepreneur Maxine Clark. One of Brenneke's employers created packaging and store signage for a new store called Build-A-Bear. "I thought, Who is this woman? She must be incredibly strong or perhaps insane. Does she really think she is going to get people to spend money building their own bears?" Brenneke confessed.

Brenneke followed the store's success, however, and admired Clark's drive and ambition. There are now Build-A-Bear stores across the country. Every time she walks by the Build-A-Bear store in the Galleria she thinks of Clark's drive and fortitude, qualities Brenneke sees in herself.

She had met Clark long ago when

she was in the process of opening Build-A-Bear. "To think I knew her, when she was just like me — just starting out, working hard and not willing to give up," said a more humbled Brenneke, who would some day like to franchise She's The One.

For now, it's obvious Brenneke enjoys rolling up her sleeves and being shoulder-to-shoulder with members who are also striving toward a goal.

Lesson learned — dreams really do come true, but you probably shouldn't stay up all night as it may not be too healthy!



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## What Can Women Do to Improve Their Health?

Cindy Brenneke Offers the Following Advice

1. Think positively. Don't let negative thoughts keep you from succeeding. You are in control of your thoughts and actions. If you tell yourself you will make a healthy lifestyle change, you will make a lifestyle change.

2. Respect your body. Know that this is the only one you will ever have. Often we spend more time and money on our cars or homes than we do our bodies. These things typically don't last a lifetime.

3. Eat healthy. Don't diet! Most diets lead to failure. Stop putting bad things in your mouth. Ask yourself Is it worth five minutes of satisfaction for your taste buds to put on extra pounds and calories which can lead to increased risk of obesity and heart disease?

4. Drink plenty of water and/or green tea. Our body craves and needs water. Drinking more water is one of the easiest steps you can take to improving your health.

5. Get your exercise.

The benefits are many....

- Total blood volume increases
- Bone density increases
- Metabolism increases
- Productivity improves
- Reasoning skills improve
- Stress and depression decrease
- Varicose vein occurrence reduced
- Weight loss
- Sleep is more continuous and restful
- Heart muscles grow stronger
- Blood pressure decreases
- Digestion improves
- Self image and self esteem improve
- Reaction time improves
- Risk of injury is reduced
- Risk of high cholesterol reduced
- Reduced likelihood of extreme PMS

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