

BUSINESS Hitting Their Stride

FitOne founders saw that flexing muscles could gain them ground



Caity Davis and Jill Stump

When business partners **Caity Davis** and **Jill Stump** launched a personal training company in 1999, they knew they eventually wanted to open their own studio.

But it was quite a serendipitous discovery that led them to the Old

Town location that is now the home of FitOne.

"She literally ran by it," said Stump of how Davis found the perfect location for their recently opened studio.

Out jogging in her Alexandria neighborhood, Davis saw the empty

storefront just as the pair were readying to make the leap from working at a gym to opening their own.

"[We] came in and fell in love with it," Davis said. "It felt right ... and we decided to go for it."

FitOne opened less than a year ago and has so far attracted more than 80 regular clients from all over Northern Virginia and the District with its combination of serious fitness, friendly trainers and unique classes (belly dancing happy hour, anyone?).

But for Davis, 36, and Stump, 33, who are both certified personal trainers with a focus on resistance training, the seemingly overnight success didn't come as quickly as it appeared.

Davis, who grew up in Northern Virginia, and Stump, who is from southwestern Virginia and moved here after graduating from the University of Virginia, met more than eight years ago at a Gold's Gym in Fairfax.

While they didn't know each other well, they both had ambitions to work in the fitness industry full time. A mutual fitness mentor of theirs recognized the similarity and suggested they go into business together.

The duo teamed up right away, but instead of making an immediate leap into self-employment, they took a long and prudent road to FitOne as it exists today.

Davis and Stump launched FitOne as a personal training company and became the in-house trainers for a Gold's Gym in Annandale—a move that helped ready them to one day have their own studio.

The nice thing about being in an established gym, Davis said, was that “we could concentrate on the fitness services themselves, rather than the operation of the facility.”

FitOne soon set up shop in three Northern Virginia Gold's Gyms, and Davis and Stump were overseeing about 25 trainers.

When Gold's offered them a fourth gym, the pair—who were clearly on the fast track to success—made a surprising business decision. They left Gold's altogether for a small, family-owned fitness company called Jungle Gym's.

“We were very torn because it was a matter of quality over quantity,” Davis said. “Gold's Gym is a very large gym ... We had to sit down and discuss with each other and find out which path we were really trying to go towards.”

They decided the path they were on didn't involve a corporate ladder. So they downsized and took FitOne to Jungle Gym's.

But, “we weren't quite there yet,” said Stump of being ready to open their own space.

That transition did, however, convince them that maybe they were closer than they thought.

“What gave us the confidence [to open our own studio] was when we saw how many clients stayed with us [when we went to Jungle Gym's],” Davis said. “And even our clients were asking us, ‘When are you going to open your own space?’”

So when Davis exercised her way past what is now their Saint Asaph Street studio, they were ready.

The best thing about owning their own gym? Sweating the small stuff.

“[We concentrate] on things as

small as, Where can clients put their stuff when they come in?” Stump said. “Caity and I labored over that for weeks. We wanted to have baskets if they have a bag, but if someone has an umbrella or a coat, we need something for that, and if someone just has keys, we need a key hook.”

But even more than having control over everything from the exercise equipment to the key hooks, Davis

said, is the fact that their patience finally paid off.

“I've always said that I can't wait until the day when I can look back and say, That's what it was all for,” she said. “It's so interesting to see the evolution of our company because this is what it was all for. Moving from a big gym like Gold's to a smaller one like Jungle's and then to [finally] come here. It's perfect. Here we are and it's perfect.”—KW