

An Extraordinary Story of Recovery, Friendship and Community Support

By Sophie Braccini



left to right: Katie Santos, Louise McMenamini and Claudia Moose

Photo courtesy of Absolute Center

When three young women decided to create the Absolute Center, a yoga and Pilates studio in Lafayette, many were skeptical about their chances of success. They were three friends who had worked together at the Oakwood Athletic Club in Lafayette and who wanted to bring their own vision of fitness to fruition. Then, after three years and great success, adversity struck and their beliefs and values were tested along with those of their clients.

A year ago the youngest of the three, Louise McMenamini, was diagnosed with a rare condition: Aplastic Anemia, a bone marrow disease that, if left untreated, leads to death within six months. The cure for the acute form of the disease requires the suppression of the immune system with intense chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant from a matching donor. McMenamini is of Northern European ancestry, an ethnically close-knit group and Stanford University Hospital was able to identify 12 potential donors. With the help of one of these donors, McMenamini had the transplant and after a year, is considered cured.

Since her diagnosis and during the long months of treatment, her two business partners pulled together and organized a support group for McMenamini. In many business relationships, when a partner suffers a severe and debilitating disease they often leave the venture to face their situation on their own. For Claudia Moose and Katie Santos, McMenamini's partners, that was not going to be the case. They made sure McMenamini stayed part of the team and organized a fundraiser to help support their friend through treatment and recovery. "Oakwood Athletic Club was very supportive," says Moose, "they let us hold the main event at their facility and

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took care of a lot of the material part of the organization, like flyers and paraphernalia." Santos adds, "The most amazing thing was the response of our clients; they contributed beyond our wildest expectations, and so did members of the community at large." Ultimately, they were able to raise \$125,000 for McMenamini.

Today, the three women are working together moving on to a new phase of their venture. They plan to triple the size of their facility to accommodate an increasing demand for classes and training sessions. This rapid growth is the confirmation of their early success when, in 2003, they reached their profitability level after only 6 months. "The popularity of the Absolute Center comes from its very personal approach to reconditioning," explains Santos. Clients are not members, they are clients; they choose programs and classes with specific trainers. They have a choice of Pilates, yoga or a mixture of both to create a personalized, functional integrated training program.

In November, the Center will hold a grand opening week to celebrate the expansion with free classes and a fundraiser to benefit St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Absolute Center is located at 3658 Mt. Diablo Blvd, Suite 101 - (925) 299 9642.

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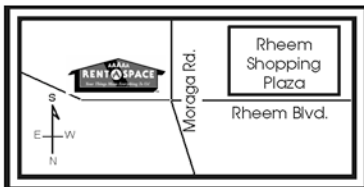


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