

ALL THAT *Matters* Celebrating 15 Years

by Jane Bernstein

It all began in the summer of 1994. Joan Dwyer and Jeanne Wettlaufer – friends, neighbors and mothers in their mid-30s – were at a crossroads in their lives. Wettlaufer was an organic farmer with a herniated disk that kept her out of her fields and in bed, and Dwyer, raising five children, was also at a turning point. For both women, from the loam of personal challenge emerged the question, What do I want? The answer was “All That Matters.”

In March 1995, the two friends opened the doors of a little yoga studio and holistic health center on Main Street in Wakefield. Fifteen years later, 1,000 people come weekly to All That Matters (ATM) for yoga classes, self-development programs, certifications programs, a retail store, and therapeutic health services provided by physicians and therapists trained in Eastern and Western traditions. Today ATM is the stuff of Dwyer and Wettlaufer’s one-time dreams: it is the largest non-residential holistic center in New England.

The Seed

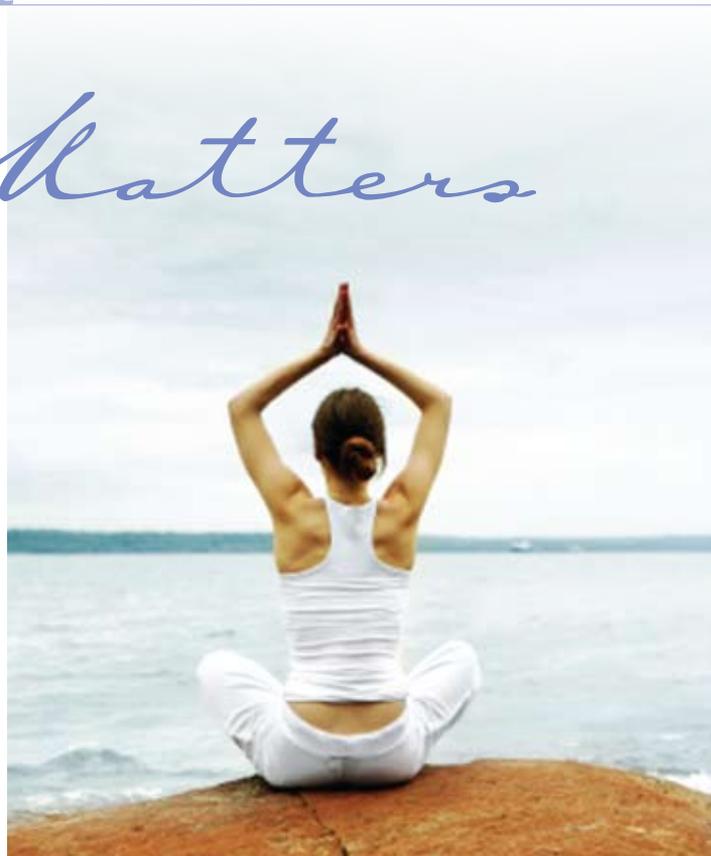
In the 1990s Dwyer had to go “underground” for everything she believed in – for diet, for spirituality, and good quality holistic medical care. She says she had to travel to get to a homeopath and had to go to someone’s living room to get a yoga class. “I began to feel a calling,” says Dwyer. “It was time to get all this out from underground.”

During that summer in 1994, the two friends started to dream of a holistic health center in Rhode Island. Imagining they would have other partners, they sponsored community meetings for anybody interested in a holistic health center in South County. Although no partners appeared, it was clear that the community would welcome an All That Matters.

From Vision to Building

While looking for possible locations, they discovered they had an even bigger vision for their project. Once on paper, five pages of notes included All That Matters’ original mission statement (which still guides it today): to work together with a group of talented people to educate and support each other and our community to continually grow and maintain optimal health and wellbeing.

When Dwyer found a Main Street building for sale at a steeply discounted price, she objected because she says it



was ugly and they didn’t have any money.

Wettlaufer, however, was adamant about needing a building in which to root the seeds of their dreams. She had long run a farm and her then-husband was a builder: “I was comfortable with real estate and creating spaces,” Wettlaufer says. “Joan knew how to run an office, which I didn’t know anything about. Our talents were very different – which was helpful – and our vision was the same.”

The building required a \$10,000 deposit. “We didn’t have it,” Dwyer remembers. “But the next day we got a check for \$10,000 from a healer we both had worked with. The note said, ‘I was meditating and Archangel Michael told me you needed a loan. I’m not sure what this is for. Here’s \$10,000’. We just screamed. Then we bravely put our homes down as collateral, and we bought the building.”

Early Days

For the first four years, ATM had one yoga studio, an office, and another small room for classes, massage, and other therapies. The space was somewhat challenging, but the energy was flowing.

“We started out with six or eight yoga classes a week, one chi gong class, and one massage therapist,” remembers Dwyer. “Slowly we added a few more yoga classes and then programs like drumming and Reiki.”

They had done research on how to start a center, used solid models, and incorporated elements about other centers that moved them – simple things like how well signs were

posted all through Kripalu. Omega was another inspiration. "We aligned with people who we thought were doing what we wanted to do well, if on a much larger scale. We had a big vision, but didn't have any idea we'd make it this big."

A Family Business Grows

In the early days, the two put flyers everywhere, and the business kept growing. Neither woman owned a computer when they opened their door for business. They borrowed one to make flyers – teaching themselves how to use it as they went. They sent out press releases, joined the Chamber of Commerce, and benefited from the "free" publicity of being on Main Street. They also gave free talks whenever anyone asked, a community outreach effort that evolved ATM's current Speakers Bureau.

After four years, ATM expanded into the space it occupies today, adding two studios and another classroom, three treatment rooms, two full bathrooms, and the front desk area. This is when they started hiring different types of therapists and doctors.

"It wasn't until we built the three treatment rooms that we had the right space for health professionals and could start to develop that aspect of ATM," says Dwyer.

Next Steps

In January 2003, ATM expanded to its present size. The following year Wettlaufer returned to farming and became a silent partner at ATM. In 2005 Dwyer became the 100 percent owner and director of the center.

ATM's core yoga staff has grown to 21 talented and dedicated instructors. The roster of ATM workshops has grown large enough to require a 30-page catalog and a program director. ATM has also added depth to its health services team, with an acupuncturist, a chiropractor, and other practitioners.

Celebrating 15 Years of Service & Evolution

Coming upon 15 years at ATM, Dwyer reflects on the organic nature of the adventure: "Jeanne and I were leading from our heart all through this process – and that was before managing from the heart became trendy."

"People would tell us they moved to the area because they saw ATM and knew there were like-minded people in this community. That continues to be a great feeling for me," Dwyer says.

"We're very proud to contribute to the town. It's a big piece of what Jeanne and I value about what we've done. All the healing and magic that goes on in the building has spilled out into the community."

This element of community and the "larger world" is at the foundation of ATM's perspective on its future. What excites Dwyer – and all the people connected to ATM – is helping make the world a healthier place, one person and one community at a time. As she always says "inner peace leads to world peace, and that's all that matters."

All That Matters is located at 315 Main Street in Wakefield. For more information call 401-782-2126, email Info@AllThatMatters.com or visit AllThatMatters.com.

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CHOCOLATE CALMS EMOTIONS

Chocolate can indeed assuage emotional stress, according to a new clinical trial. Researchers reporting to the American Chemical Society found that "highly stressed" volunteers, eating about an ounce-and-a-half (about 40 grams) of dark chocolate a day for two weeks, experienced reduced levels of stress hormones. The chocolate even partially corrected other stress-related biochemical imbalances by modifying metabolism.