

Sarah Lurie's Pioneering Work Is as Hearty as a Russian Workout

Entrepreneur Uses Cast-Iron Kettlebells in Fitness Regimens That Attract Loyal Customers

BY PAT BRODERICK

Putting a kettle on might conjure up some warm and cozy images of bone china teacups and freshly baked scones. But there is another variety gaining popularity nationwide and a local entrepreneur is among those leading the way.

More than two years ago, Sarah Lurie, a former Wall Street stockbroker, founded **Iron Core - Kettlebell Strength and Conditioning** in La Jolla, billed as the first fitness studio on the West Coast to train students exclusively in the use of cast-iron kettlebells. Dating back a few centuries to Russia, where they were known as giryas, these cannon ball-shaped weights with kettle-style handles were generally favored by strongmen and military types.

But Lurie, 36, saw the potential for the devices, and believed they could benefit all types of bodies.

"I've always been very involved in weight training and athletics," said Lurie, who earned a bachelor's degree in economics at the University of Arizona, and a master's in public administration at San Diego State University. "I got very serious about weight training in college."

Then, in 2002, she discovered kettlebells "by accident," reading some of the books authored by Pavel Tsatsouline, considered the father of modern kettlebells, and credited with bringing them to the United

States. She started incorporating them into her regular fitness regimen.

"I noticed immediately an improvement in my strength level and how I look," said Lurie.

Then she returned to her regular gym.

"I thought, 'This stuff doesn't make any sense to me anymore,'" she recalled. "People I work with report a similar feeling. Kettlebells make a lot of sense to the body, because you move in a way that you move in real life. Our bodies don't move in one dimension."

In 2004, Lurie became certified as a Russian kettlebell instructor by Pavel's organization, russiankettlebells.com. In addition to her classes, she also sells her own instructional DVDs online, and, last December, began distributing them in the United Kingdom and Australia.

The Next Craze

Lurie predicts that kettlebells will become the next big thing, right up there with yoga and pilates.

Richard Davis, co-founder of the Tulsa, Okla.-based GoFit, a national distributor of fitness products, is banking on it — and her. He now is in negotiations with retail outlets he supplies, including Target and Sport Chalet, to stock Lurie's Iron Core brand kettlebells and DVDs. He expects them to be in stores nationwide by late summer, retailing for \$30 to \$100, depending on the size of the weights.

"Kettlebells are starting to build quite a buzz in the fitness industry," he said.

As with the company's other products, Davis planned to pair the equipment with expert instruction. He discovered that the sport was especially popular with women, and noted that, "70 percent of purchasing



Photo courtesy of Iron Core La Jolla
Sarah Lurie is doing her best to put kettlebells on the front burner of the fitness industry.

decisions are made by females."

"We needed a female persona attached to this product," said Davis. "We came across Sarah and her DVDs, and decided that this would make a good marriage. She is really one of the leaders of female trainers out there in the market."

According to Davis, GoFit sells about 50,000 products nationally per week.

"With Sarah attaching her likeness, this will do a lot to build her brand and the Iron Core logo," he said. "There is a lot of cache attached to being the first to market."

Racking Up Revenue

Iron Core generated revenues of \$250,000 in the past year, said Lurie, who expects to double that in 2007, factoring in proceeds from her classes, DVDs and personal training sessions, but not including what she can generate from new retail deals.

Now operating out of a 1,200-square-foot studio, Lurie is negotiating a lease on a 4,000-square-foot facility in the Mission Brewery Plaza at Washington Street and Interstate 5, a more accessible location where she hopes to move later this year.

The larger venue will help her gauge the potential of franchise, she said.

"We have had such success in a small market," said Lurie, who initially invested \$50,000 in personal savings into her startup, and another \$25,000 for building improvements. "My ultimate goal would be to expand into other markets."

Working It

A visit to one of her 8:30 a.m. Monday classes finds five women, from 20-somethings to middle-aged, stretching, squatting and lunging, while hefting the kettlebells. The weights, lined up along the floor in varying sizes, range from 9 pounds to 88 pounds. While Lurie herself can squat more than 200 pounds, and swing a 70-pound kettlebell with ease, the average female initially stays within the 9-pound to 26-pound range, with males hoisting from 26 to 36 pounds, she said.

Before students are admitted to her 45-minute classes, they must take a two-hour workshop to get acclimated to the new workout.

On this particular day, the mild-mannered, auburn-haired Lurie, dressed in a

white sweatshirt and black workout pants, guides her students through some challenging moves. With intense concentration, they dutifully follow her lead, swinging the kettlebells in an arc, while they deftly balance their bodies in a variety of demanding poses.

Sandy Anderson, one of Lurie's middle-aged students, has been attending her classes for two years now. Having had some health issues, Anderson appreciates that Lurie is able to adapt the moves to accommodate her needs.

"I play a lot of tennis, and I have a treadmill and elliptical machine at home," said Anderson. "But I love this workout, because you get cardio and strength training at the same time."

Her husband, Ken, a Pacific Beach physician who specializes in sports medicine, also works out there.

Kettlebell Zealots

No two classes are the same, said Lurie. She charges from \$99 to \$149 a month for classes, \$65 to \$75 for personal training sessions and offers instruction online.

"I'm always changing it up," she said. "My students say they never know what's coming next."

Evenly split between men and women, Lurie's students range from just regular folks to athletes and those in the military, including a Marine Corps colonel, who "brought his whole family in." Some of them travel from as far away as Los Angeles and Orange County, she said, and five of her clients have gone on to become certified trainers.

"I have two other full-time instructors, in addition to myself, and a part-timer, all former clients," said Lurie.

Kelly Urban, 30, started working out at Iron Core when it first opened, and is planning on taking the certification test herself.

"I had done yoga, kick-boxing classes, all the normal stuff, and I came across kettlebells and Iron Core, and got totally hooked," she said. "I am a kettlebell zealot."

In addition to getting leaner and well-toned, Urban observed that it also did wonders for her golf game.

"I swing a lot harder, and, in the office, I'm the only girl who can swing around those big water jugs and get them on the machine."

True Believer

Bill Van Dusen, a principal in the San Diego law firm of **Smylie & Van Dusen**, serves as both Lurie's attorney and client.

"She came to me when she was conceiving the idea for her business," he said. "I became a student and fan of hers. I always worked out, but I wanted something different."

With two small children at home, both he and his wife, Althea, also like the option of working out at home with Lurie's DVDs.

"I don't have much time to go to the gym," he said. "It intrigued me that you can get a good workout at home, with one piece of equipment."

But Van Dusen added, "I always get a better workout at the studio. She pushes me, but not too hard."

He also admires Lurie for being a pioneer in the field.

"She didn't have a blueprint, and, the truth is, kettlebells are a male-dominated sport," he observed. "She didn't let that deter her at all, and I applaud her for that. She has a vision, sets goals and accomplishes them."

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