

All That Matters Celebrates 20 Years of Service

By Jane Bernstein

In March 1995, two friends opened the doors of a little yoga and holistic health center on Main Street in Wakefield, Rhode Island. This was decades before the booming yoga “industry” – at the time, people weren’t sure if they were in the business of *yoga* or *yogurt*, and the few yoga classes that could be found were located in someone’s living room or a church basement. That’s where Joan Dwyer, co-founder of All That Matters, did yoga before she and business partner Jeanne Wettlaufer, bravely used their homes as collateral to buy a building and invite the public in. They envisioned “working 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.” Their original mission statement still guides All That Matters 20 years later.

Today the center welcomes 1,000+ people weekly for more than 60 yoga and meditation classes, workshops and professional trainings, a retail store, and alternative healthcare services – from acupuncture and chiropractic to massage therapy and spa treatments. The arc of All That Matters’ two decades’ journey reflects both the growth of \$27 billion yoga industry with 20 million practitioners worldwide and one Rhode Island community’s growing commitment to mind-body health.

The Space

All That Matters’ original space – one yoga studio, an office, and a small room for classes, massage, and other therapies – “was somewhat challenging but had good energy,” Dwyer says, remembering massage tables and other equipment that had to be carried up and down stairs. By 2003, All That Matters had expanded dramatically from 1,000 to 7,000 square feet, adding two studios, a classroom, two full bathrooms, a front desk area, an award-winning store, two offices and three treatment rooms. That expansion opened new options for the center; for example, it now had the right space for health professionals, giving that aspect of the business room to grow.

The Team

Two moms (with a total of eight kids), a yoga teacher, a massage therapist, and a few volunteers comprised All That Matters’ original team. Over time, Wettlaufer returned to her work in farming, the building – which still houses All That Matters – was sold, and in 2005 Dwyer jumped 100 percent into directing the center and attracting a team that dazzles her and expertly serves the community. The core yoga staff has grown to 21 talented and dedicated instructors. Ten staff members work full- and part-time, in management, in the store, and at the front desk. The health services team numbers 13. “It took almost 15 years, but we finally learned how to create health and ease *for ourselves* as we create a healing space for our clients,” Dwyer says. “Our staff loves the work we do and each other!”

Classes and Programs

All That Matters started with seven yoga classes and one qigong class a week, then slowly added more yoga as well as programs like drumming and Reiki. Over time the center began offering workshops in everything from detox to shamanism, reflexology trainings to yoga teacher trainings, as well as programs with local teachers, including Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction and All That Matters' 40-Day (R)EVOLUTION – its most popular program (with more than 1,000 grads) in which students commit to 40 days of eating well, meditating, and doing yoga in community. As the center grew, All That Matters also began hosting internationally known teachers such as Shiva Rea, Andrew Harvey, Amrit Desai, Aadil Palkhivala, and Foster Perry. At its maximum, the center ran more than 200 programs a year, a pace that kept the programming and operations staff working overtime. “We recently cut our workshops down by 65%, freeing our staff to do less – better, smarter, and more profitably – which opened up energy for us to pursue fresh ideas,” Program Director Lisa Dahl says.

From Mom-and-Pop to MBA

“We began with a borrowed a computer, learning how to use it as we made our first flyers and press releases,” Dwyer remembers. This was back in the days before businesses routinely had websites, email, or accounting software – all of which rapidly became standard. “Running the studio equaled earning the graduate degree in business that we didn’t have at the start,” she says. “We became tech savvy and got comfortable with public speaking, marketing, writing, customer service, price increases, and managing our ever-growing budget.”

Evolving through very low-tech to high-tech, All That Matters today has a fully integrated website that gets 14,000 visits a month, enough computers to warrant a monthly service contract, and a YogaVibes video-camera in-house so students can take our yoga classes anywhere in the world via our affiliate website. The center has become a model of the business of yoga and the yoga of business, and Dwyer’s work now includes funneling her decades of business experience to empowering start-up yoga centers and other health-related ventures to succeed.

Community Outreach

From the start, All That Matters encouraged the growth of its hometown, which was somewhat rundown in the mid-90s with vacant buildings and struggling stores. “With our active yoga studio anchoring Main Street, downtown Wakefield really woke up,” Dwyer says. The center has continued on a path of active involvement in the Village of Wakefield Association, helping launch community art and merriment events like Festival Fete and River Fire. In addition, each year All That Matters donate hundreds of gift cards to community fundraising efforts, collects food for the local food bank, provides scholarships for workshops and events, and offers free programs to the public. “In the early days, we gave free talks whenever anyone asked, a community outreach effort that evolved into our current Speakers Bureau,” says Dwyer, who talks with groups from high school students to beach resort staff on subjects ranging from healthy eating to mindfulness. She also reaches out to a national forum, addressing yoga conferences around the country.

Celebrating 20

All That Matters Yoga and Holistic Health Center is commemorating the milestone of its 20th anniversary with a year-long celebration of vitality. Throughout 2015, this hub for health at 315 Main Street is inviting everyone – from seasoned yogis to newcomers to body-mind practices – to join the festivities, including a 20-day yoga challenge and a blessing and open-house party. The celebration's *piece de resistance* is a debut membership program, Peace, Love, Yoga + Perks, which All That Matters launched to make unlimited yoga available to the community at \$89/month. Membership also includes other perks, such as a discount on store purchases, bodywork, health services, and workshops, plus free guest passes and an All That Matters mug. The community has been expressing enormous appreciation and showing up strongly to explore self-care and yoga, many people for the first time. "As All That Matters enters a third decade of service, our membership program is one way we're expressing our gratitude for the wisdom and science of yoga, and for the community in Wakefield," says Director of Development Cindi Booth.

"We started by doing yoga on the mat in a small studio, and now, having encouraged our students for nearly 20 years, we can proudly say that we have taken our yoga with us off the mat and into the world," reflects Dwyer. What keeps her – and all the people connected to ATM – inspired 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 is all that matters."

Jane Bernstein took her first yoga class in 1995 and has been practicing ever since. She did her yoga teacher training at All That Matters.



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