



Sharon M. Smith

Palm Coast, Florida



Ship Shape Water Fitness Specialists, Llc

Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Sharon M. Smith:

Sharon Smith, Owner of Ship Shape Water Fitness Specialists, LLC, originally started her business in Jonesboro, GA. At the time, she had a land-based exercise studio, but during the summer months would allow members to use her backyard pool. After realizing more students were going to the pool versus land classes, and after requests to move her land routines to the water, she started offering water aerobic classes several days a week.

"Before I invited anyone over, I started practicing my own routines in the pool as a way to drop body fat and not have the impact that comes with land-based aerobics," Smith said. "I quickly saw an opportunity for all my members that were banging themselves up and getting shin splints resulting from running in road races. I sort of made up the routine and refined it along the way because the resistance is from the top. Rather

than fighting old-man gravity to get up we are working against buoyancy which helps to correct our posture and is very strengthening."

As the popularity and demand increased for Smith's water aerobics, she was quickly in need of a bigger pool. She located a large pool on the south side of Atlanta and was greeted by 52 attendees for the first class. That's when she knew she was onto something big.

"That's when I really found and connected with my true passion," she said. "I love being in the water and so do a lot of other people. They hear 'no impact' and they're in. Due to the increase in hydro-static pressure, your blood pressure and heart-rate goes down and your organs shift upward to improve breathing. It helps with cardio vascular and cardio respiratory diseases because of the increased oxygen consumption

Water aerobics has so many benefits."

In 2006, Smith, after growing tired of Atlanta traffic and politics, relocated to beautiful Flagler County. She sold the original business, then under a different name, but was determined to bring the exact concept to north east Florida. According to Smith, "the transition was very easy as water exercise sells itself!"

"Anywhere you go, most people are going to love the water," she said.

"That's especially true in Florida. Even though I had to do a lot of marketing on my own, starting over wasn't that hard. I found resorts and hotels that wanted water aerobics programs for their snowbirds. I also formed partnerships with assisted living facilities to offer services for their residents."

In addition to group classes, Smith offers programs for people that have

recently completed physical therapy but aren't quite ready for a group setting. She offers personal training services and employs several college interns but mostly instructors 55 and older. She even has instructors that go to client's home pools for personalized training.

"Ultimately, we're promoting wellness through physical activity as a way to get people out of pain," Smith said. "We focus on increasing activities of daily living and reducing pain versus becoming fit. Improved fitness will follow."

Smith continued, "When I first started this business, fitness classes in the water wasn't covered by insurance. Now it is with most insurance plans. Doctors today are more likely to refer people to water training as a way to treat their pain. I developed a board of advisors, mostly doctors, in Georgia and I am developing the same in this area too."

Looking ahead, Smith, who loves to inspire people to continue moving in a pain-free environment and to become stronger and more fit, is focused on growing her business and expanding her reach. As stated earlier, she's also focused on providing jobs for college students and seniors re-entering the work force.

What advice does Smith have for aspiring entrepreneurs? "This is one of the fastest growing fields in the country," she said. "The Aquatic Therapy company I market for Florida is entitled, Integrated Therapy, LLC and is the largest in the Southeast and the largest provider of aquatic therapy for insurance companies such as Kaiser and the VA. If you're thinking about starting a business, this is a rewarding industry to get into that you can develop yourself into a full time Aquapreneur."

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