

The History of the Pyramid

by William D. Kelley, Ph.D.

I had spent the majority of my adult life working for traditional mental health facilities, college counseling centers, and fitness clubs. However, I knew from my own personal work that there was much more to the wellness picture. Addressing one's overall wellness was a complex process of looking at the total person, and although working on the physical, emotional, and spiritual beings separately is effective, it is not *nearly* as effective as addressing all of these simultaneously. While I knew such facilities existed, I had never seen one first hand, and certainly not with the breadth of products and services I knew was necessary to really make a lasting difference in peoples' lives.

After a very enjoyable career in college wellness and administration, I was ready to move to the next phase of my life in 2004. I was raking leaves when I wondered what that would be. Within seconds, I saw a row of practitioner spaces and I knew I was supposed to create a holistic center where people could come together to address wellness on every level. I wanted to create a place of peace where people could work collaboratively on the physical, emotional, occupational, and spiritual realms of human life.

As soon as I defined what it was I wanted to do, all of the pieces miraculously fell into place...effortlessly. All the right people came along at just the right time, and the original Pyramid team was formed. I am eternally grateful to the people who helped create our dream at 116 West Street in Rutland. First came my friends and colleagues with paint brushes, enthusiasm, and imagination. Together, we transformed an empty space into an incredible place of healing. I know in those early days my friends were not quite sure we could pull it off. I thank them for sticking by me—Mark and Mara Schiff, Martha and Brian Martel, Pat and Michelle Murphy, Nicole Semp, Jane Young, Helena Wu, Becky Eno, Matt Ransom, Karen Sabataso, and Teri D. especially for their work. Then came Josh Moore, who initially was just looking for something part-time to supplement his income, but he saw the potential of what we were doing and took a leap of faith to become our Director of Fitness. Then Dr. Margaret Smiechowski came, bringing with her a fresh take on homeopathy and some strange idea about building something called a salt cave. She wasn't sure how it would work in Rutland, but she was willing to give it a try if she could find the right location. Then came Darya McNolty—I cannot believe I initially told her that we did not need her because we already had plenty of people who had expressed an interest in doing massage. Of course, she brought her incredible personality and volunteered day after day doing cleaning, sewing, and anything else that needed to be done...and the core of our team was formed. Then, one by one, each talented person came—Mary Conrad, Kathleen Fleury, Darci Whitehorne, Bob Chandler, Tammy Brown...each day a new person. It was like a dream come true as we assembled our team, each person adding his or her own new block to the pyramid.

By the time we opened on August 8, 2007 (the Egyptian new year, by the way!) we were filled with excitement but also a little bit of apprehension. Was Rutland ready for us? Would people like what we spent months creating? Would people actually see what we were doing as a viable business? Until opening day, the Center had curtains in the windows and no one outside of our team had seen the place. We had bonded in a way that most coworkers are not able, and we enjoyed being together so much that we were scared we would lose this special situation when we opened our doors.

And although the first day was very exciting, we had a few months that were slow as Rutland began getting used to hearing about us. I am sure the Rutlanders, used to businesses coming and going in downtown, were skeptical. I heard rumors that people thought we were a religious organization or cult and doing voodoo. Thankfully, over time Rutland gave us a chance and it became clear that we were on to something.

After we had been open a few months, we added the Salt Cave and things were really starting to go well. Additional instructors and practitioners joined us...Kammie Kayl, Alison Hans, Jennifer Coleman, Alicia Malay, Raven, and so many more awesome people. And thankfully we also built a solid group of “regulars.”

It seemed like we were just starting to really get the hang of what we were doing. Then, on June 14, 2008, Rutland was hit with some powerful storms, and the Pyramid was flooded with backed up sewer. Our entire lower level, including the Salt Cave, was destroyed in a matter of seconds. I cannot express how grateful I am to the people who helped us get through the flood—so many people to thank, but especially Jane Skakel, the entire Murphy family, Ed Larson, Cameron Lacey, Jen Lasell, Kitty Canfield, Arlene Zivitz, Alicia Malay—so many people were shocked as we were and wanted to see us get through it. I am still not sure how we did.

Following the flood, we spent months identifying a new, safer location, and when we found the location at 120 Merchants Row, we took a few extra months to make it what it is today. We are proud of our current home, which has a diverse, rich history in the Downtown area. Bryn Milks joined our team, as well as several new instructors and practitioners. We were trying to show Rutland that we were here to stay, and it would take more than a flood to get rid of us. Of course, the new location ended up being better for us in terms of visibility, and the press we received as a result of the flood helped us to become Downtown’s premier wellness facility, boasting more practitioners than any other, and back then the only public Himalayan salt cave in the Northeast.

Just when we all started getting comfortable in our new home, it became clear that we needed to do more. We started thinking about ways that we could expand—offering new, additional services to Vermont—in new locations. Then, several personal issues came up in my life that forced me to quit working at the local health clubs that I had worked at for ten years. I began missing the health club scene and realized that now was the time to fulfill my youthful dream of opening a fitness center. Although Rutland already had many great fitness and wellness facilities, we wanted a fitness center in the Pyramid tradition—great customer service, great exercise equipment and classes, and great prices. On December 21, 2010, we opened Pyramid Fitness and Oxygen Bar—the first public oxygen bar in Vermont—and soon after we opened the halotherapy room. While many people question our sanity for doing such a major expansion in a difficult economy where many businesses were folding up, to me it is a no-brainer. Despite all of the excellent facilities in Rutland, Rutland County is *still* the unhealthiest county in Vermont. Obesity...smoking...stress-related disorders...cancer...heart problems...drugs...crime. People need more options for wellness, and whether we are insane or not, we are committed to the well-being of those in our community who are struggling.

And it is for this reason that we will continue to focus on providing quality, professional, caring, affordable, and convenient products and services to our community...and perhaps even beyond. We want to see the world become a better place, and we know that the Pyramid model can be part of that.

So although the Pyramid was initially my idea, it is through the hard work and dedication of dozens of people that it has survived. It has been an amazing journey to watch it unfold and become what it is today, and what it will be tomorrow. I do not “own” the Pyramid because it has a life of its own, and is “owned” by everyone who chooses to work there and use it. We are all eternally grateful.