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Mikki Reilly, a Santa Barbara-based entrepreneur, opened Fitness Transform and recently published "Your Primal Body," a diet and fitness book. Here, she practices Russian kettlebell swings at her 1213 State St. studio.

## Heavy lifting required WEV graduate forges following in fitness

By Alex Kacik  
Staff Writer

Alan Irwin's friends didn't even recognize him anymore.

"I've been involved with this community for 36 years; I've been here since college," he said. "I would run into friends who would recognize my wife and wonder if she was seeing somebody new."

Weight Watchers only got Irwin so far. Personal certified fitness trainer Mikki Reilly guided the Santa Barbara software engineer through a complete transformation that helped him lose nearly 90 pounds. That's because Reilly understands the science and physiology behind the training, Irwin said.

"She uses functional training, which is very different than isolated training with machines," he said. "Mikki taught me to use my body as a tool to accomplish things in my daily life."

Reilly, who recently published her first diet and exercise book, started her own fitness studio after completing entrepreneurship training through Women's Economic Ventures, or WEV.

Her fitness program caters in large part to business and technology executives on the South Coast looking for a healthier lifestyle or simply a leaner physique.

She grew up on the East Coast, where her two brothers "played rough" for as long as

she could remember. She moved to Santa Barbara when she was 19 years old to study exercise and health science and communication at UC Santa Barbara.

"I understand their anatomy, and when they are having problems I know what's going on with their physiology," she said of her clients. "When they have tightness I can help them out with specific foam roll and stretching because I have an understanding of their bodies and can interpret the science."

Soon after Reilly arrived Santa Barbara, a couple of friends encouraged her to enter bodybuilding competitions. After placing well in several contests, Reilly started helping a personal trainer with her fitness. When the trainer's clients began to notice, Reilly realized she had found her career.

"It's what opened my eyes to the fact that I should think about this as a career," she said.

The International Sports Science Association Distinguished Achievement Award-winner worked in various gyms in Santa Barbara as a certified personal trainer for 13 years until Santa Barbara Gym & Fitness closed in 2005.

Reilly took the opportunity to enroll in a WEV course, which helped open up her Fitness Transform studio at 1213 State St. about a year ago. WEV is a Santa Barbara-based nonprofit that offers startup financing and business training to small-business entrepreneurs.

Reilly also recently published her first book, "Your Primal Body." The idea of lifting weights and sticking to low-fat diets isn't going to change people's bodies, she said. If people want to achieve a lean, muscular and vibrantly healthy body they should look to their DNA.

"The human genome hasn't changed for more than 40,000 years since we were hunter-gatherers," Reilly said. "Our bodies are designed to do what early humans did every day — stay lean and muscular to hunt and gather food, live a long and healthy life free of disease and move quickly to get out of harm's way."

Reilly mixes squatting, lunging, pushing, pulling, bending and twisting with resistance training and high-intensity interval training. That combined with the Paleo diet that focuses on high-quality animal protein, vegetables, raw nuts and eliminates vegetable oils and grains and beans will produce lean muscle and pain-free joints, Reilly said. The training is tailored for people like Irwin who have sedentary lifestyles, she said.

"I thought it was going to be mostly running but it's about building up muscle mass," Irwin said. "She takes the science of what is going on to build up muscle to build up metabolism, improve flexibility and the biggest surprise for me was the loss of pain. It's amazing how much more energy I have."

The difference is in building muscles

that people use every day, Reilly told the Business Times in her studio in the Victoria Court. The Russian kettlebell certified instructor grabbed a 30-pound kettlebell to demonstrate. She placed the round cast-iron weight with a handle on the ground in between her legs that are spread shoulder-width apart. She bent her knees, grabbed the kettlebell with her left arm and used her back as a hinge to swing the weight between her legs and use the momentum to lift it high over her head. Reilly's whole body was flat as a plank as her outstretched arm held the weight in the air for a second before she let the kettlebell drop between her legs, bending at her knees and back and swung up again.

"The biggest misconception is that cardio is the best way to get fit," Reilly said. "At the end of day, you can have dumb muscles that you use exercising on machines or smart muscles that help you achieve success in everyday living."

Irwin was an overweight 266 pounds. After two years of Reilly's diet and exercise program, the 51-year-old has a body fat percentage of 10.2 percent. His balance, coordination and stamina have improved, he's stronger than he has ever been and his back pain has disappeared, he said.

"The transformation is nothing short of miraculous," Reilly said. "My clients change so much that people can't believe they are the same person."

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