

August 11, 2011

<http://detroitnews.com/article/20110811/BIZ/108110354>

## Marketing aids therapy business

TV show segment, testimonials boost physical rehab firm

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*/ Special to The Detroit News*

**Southfield**— Business at Fitness Therapy Unlimited has grown since early June when its story aired on Detroit Public Television and circulated around the Midwest. Fifteen new clients have joined its roster.

A weekly show, "A Wider World," featured Chris Felton working with the Fitness Therapy Unlimited staff to improve his swimming from four to 10 laps across the pool. Felton lost a leg after a 2005 motorcycle accident — but not his resolve to improve through grueling therapy sessions.

Felton endorsed the unique efforts of Fitness Therapy Unlimited to uplift the mental, nutritional and cardiovascular state of their clients. They offer services at 14 locations around Metro Detroit and at client homes.

"Just a few years ago, no one was meeting the total body conditioning of individuals injured in accidents," said Greg Kirk, 33, who noticed the rest of the body went fallow when all attention was placed on a leg, hip or neck muscle.

Kirk founded the therapy business in 2006 with just two clients. He now has 80-plus clients and 17 employees, including eight professional fitness therapists, two dietitians and two massage therapists. Ninety percent of his clients are auto accident victims.

Fitness Therapy Unlimited projects \$716,000 in sales this year, up 72 percent from \$416,500 in 2010 and substantially more than the \$72,000 generated in 2007.

Kirk got the inspiration for his business model while watching patients limp and lurch past him while working as a fitness trainer at the Michigan Rehabilitation Institute in 2005.

The idea took off when he saw numerous clients leave the Detroit facility with persistent problems when their insurance coverage ran out.

"Exercise is an integral component to sustaining health," he said.

Kirk's challenge was presenting the case for ongoing therapy that worked as a complement to — not a replacement for — physical and occupational therapy for catastrophically injured patients.

"We found contacts and presented our concept to physicians, case managers and insurance companies," Kirk said. "We charge \$130 an hour, considerably less than the \$200 to \$350 hourly rate for physical therapy. Our concept is to condition the whole body, to strengthen the core as well as overcome a specific challenge."

Kirk provides biweekly reports to each client's rehabilitation team, including their doctors, insurance adjusters, case managers and physical therapists. With documented results, his referral base grows each year.

Overhead is kept low by using local pools, gymnasiums and community centers. With a limited staff and comprehensive computer scheduling, the company can meet the needs of clients all around the region, including Ronald Sullivan of Dearborn Heights.

"I'm lucky to be alive," said Sullivan, whose car was crushed by a semi-trailer that rolled over him on Memorial Day 2009, causing a head trauma, broken vertebrae and a smashed forearm.

Sullivan's nurse case manager referred him to Kirk.

"I might drag myself into therapy, but I leave feeling great," Sullivan said. "I can ride a bicycle five miles a week, and I can do laps in the pool. The therapists are tremendous."

Running a therapy business takes as much business acumen as fitness-training skills. Kirk, a graduate of Western Michigan University's physical education program, said he avoided business classes in college, but he knew enough to hire a marketing director and enlisted a business coach, Lucid Business Strategies of Shelby Township.

Kirk has learned to market relentlessly.

"Kirk is wise to accumulate good client stories, these are his value proposition," said Curtis Petterson, a Shelby Township-based consultant who is a mentor for TechTown in Detroit, where he helps hundreds of entrepreneurs design and try to start and grow small businesses. "He found a good niche. That is one of the more difficult tasks for new entrepreneurs. With the help of a coach, he can address the pitfalls and keep his business on track."

## Additional Facts

Fitness Therapy Unlimited

**Founded:** 2006

**Employees:** 17 full- and part-time

**Contact:** (248) 327-3866 or [www.ftunlimited.com](http://www.ftunlimited.com)

**Strategy:** Find a niche within the fitness and wellness industry that is sorely needed and surround yourself with knowledgeable, hard-working people who can fulfill the promise.

**Lessons for other businesses:** Don't assume you have all the answers. Hire a good business coach or recruit a mentor who can guide you.

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