

# SCGB WEEKLY

ISSUE 1515  
APRIL 13, 2015

THE WEEKLY DIGITAL MAGAZINE FOR THE ACTIVE LIFESTYLE MARKET



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ON THE COVER: Photo courtesy Asics



## MOVERS & SHAKERS

**Accell North America** named **Currie Technologies** President and e-bike evangelist **Larry Pizzi** to the additional role of SVP of Sales and Marketing for its Independent Bicycle Dealer business, which comprises Raleigh, Lapierre, Redline and SBS.

**Chaco** promoted **Todd Gordon** to VP of Sales.

**Chums**, manufacturer of eyewear retainers, outdoor accessories and apparel, welcomed **Andrew D'Acquisto** as its National Sales Manager.

**Deckers Brands** appointed **Wendy Yang** as **Teva Brand** President, effective May 1. Yang joins Deckers from New Balance where she served as GM, Women's Training, ILfestyle, Walking, since 2012.

**Kara Goucher**, two-time Olympic runner, appointed **ModCraft** to act as her business manager, publicist, brand communicator and agent.

**Maui Jim**, sunglasses manufacturer, added elite long-distance runner **Meb Keflezighi** to its team of sports ambassadors.

**Mountain Equipment Co-op** signed former Olympic cyclist and speed skater **Clara Hughes** as its newest ambassador.

**Rip Curl** promoted **Dylan Slater** to SVP Sales & Marketing for North America.

**Sport-Haley Holdings** named **Joe Westby** VP Sales for its Sport Haley and Bette & Court brands.

**Sports Specialists Ltd.** President and CEO **Stephen Rogers** will retire July 31 after more than 30 years in the post. The **Forest Group** has been hired to help search for his replacement.

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## SAUCONY LAUNCHES "SEEKER" GLOBAL BRAND CAMPAIGN

Saucony launched its largest marketing effort: a multi-media global brand campaign to remind people to seek out their potential through the transformative power of running.

Building on the brand's Find Your Strong initiative, the Seeker campaign features four vignettes that profile a series of "Seekers" who use running to find their "personal strong."

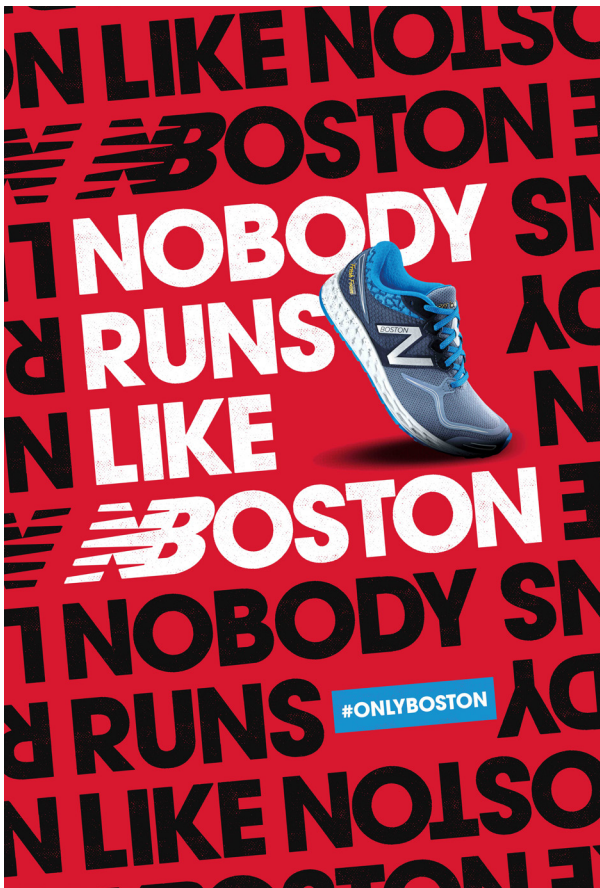
"A couple of years ago we launched a new campaign to reposition the brand around three really strong words - Find Your Strong - and we found that message has really resonated with runners everywhere," said Mary O'Brien, VP of global marketing for Saucony. "Now, we want to expand that conversation, to embrace and inspire a wider audience of runners to take up the journey. For every runner it's a different pathway but ultimately the end truth is that running changes people for the better—physically, emotionally, joyfully."

Saucony, seeking a different perspective in the creation of the Seeker series, utilized drone footage, a first for the brand. "In photographing the Seeker concept we wanted to be true to the idea," said O'Brien. "The drone's unique perspective lets us tell the "seeking" story with more clarity while allowing us to actually witness the characters' process in finding their strong."

The campaign, developed by Mechanica of Newburyport, MA, includes an immersive digital and social media experience, online ads, retail promotions, and an out-of-home marketing blitz around the Boston Marathon.

The Seeker campaign is planned to run throughout 2015 with several new executions for Fall.





## NEW BALANCE

### LAUNCHES "NOBODY RUNS LIKE BOSTON" CAMPAIGN

New Balance launched a "Nobody Runs Like Boston" campaign dedicated to its hometown city highlighting the brand's running heritage that is synonymous with Boston.

Taglines draw attention to Boston's running heritage: "Only Boston Makes You Train With Three Feet," "Only In Boston Do A Million People Take The Day Off So 30,000 Can Work," and "Only Boston's Doubleheader Includes A Marathon." New Balance's social campaign encourages consumers to share why they think Boston is an iconic running city using the hashtag #OnlyBoston.

New Balance is offering a limited edition version of its Fresh Foam Zante with the Boston skyline in the shoe's insole and the word "FASTAH" emblazoned on the sole.

"Every April we are thrilled to create a campaign that celebrates our city and the sport of running," said Jeff McAdams, head of global running marketing at New Balance. "We developed this campaign to highlight the unique running heritage in Boston and to celebrate the spring running season. Running is at the core of what we do at New Balance, and every year we look forward to welcoming the international running community to our city."

For the second year, the New Balance campaign will be featured at the Prudential Center through multiple interior wallscapes and an exterior banner and staircase advertisements honoring the runners.

New Balance will also partner with Boston-based brands such as the Lenox Hotel, Boloco, Thinking Cup, Harpoon Brewery and Roxy's Grilled Cheese to support the campaign. The brand worked with run specialty retailer Marathon Sports for the "Last Long Run" in late March, where they provided one-way transportation to Route 135 in Ashland with bag check and fuel along the route to Boylston Street.

## STEVIE KREMER AND MARSHALL THOMSON CELEBRATE WINS AT GORE-TEX ELK MOUNTAIN GRAND TRAVERSE

This grueling ski mountaineering competition is renowned as an epic partner race where competitors ski uphill and down unsupported over a course that begins in Crested Butte, CO, and ends in Aspen, CO, the next morning.

The 18th annual traverse started at Midnight on Friday, March 27. Competitors raced the 40-mile course in the Elk Mountains gaining over 7,800 vertical feet. Teams are required to be prepared for any situation knowing that help could take up to 24-hours to arrive. In addition, racers are not allowed to accept outside support if their equipment malfunctions or is lost and are required to continue without lost or broken items or quit the race. Course challenges include difficult terrain, treacherous snow conditions, potential for freezing temperatures and limited resources to navigate the course.

Hillsound Equipment ambassador Stevie Kremer won first place with her race partner Jari Kirkland in the women's division. Hillsound Equipment ambassador Marshall Thomson won first in his age group with his race partner, Rob Krar. Kremer and Thomson have been running together for six years and each have a laundry list of races they have placed in including a first-place co-ed win in the 2011 Gore-Tex Grand Traverse. Kremer has



collected first place finishes at Wolf Creek, Snow King, and Divine Incline ski mountaineering races and was named the 2014 Skyrunning World Series Champion. Thomson secured first place wins at the Leadville Trail Marathon, Teva Mountain Games, placed in the Race the Divide Monarch and Heathen Challenge at Sunlight and set the course record for the 2013 Collegiate Peaks 50-mile race.

The overall winner of this year's 2015 Elk Mountain Grand Traverse was Durango team Hamilton-Simmons with a record time of 6:44:35.40. Race directors were still setting up the finish area when they crossed the line.



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## ADIDAS AND BAA

### TO OPEN NEW "RUNBASE" STORE CONCEPT

Equal parts museum, clubhouse and store, Adidas and the Boston Athletic Association (B.A.A.), organizer of the Boston Marathon, announced the launch of the Boston Marathon RunBase in partnership with Marathon Sports, Inc.

The store will open mid-April just steps from the finish line of the marathon, but will be open all year.

Curated by the B.A.A., the space will be filled with exhibits and historic photos from the past 119 years of the Boston Marathon. The stories of the marathon's history will be rotated seasonally. A large cast of a unicorn, the iconic symbol of the marathon and a 10-foot 3D topographic animated race map made of reclaimed wood will greet customers. Four interactive screens across the space, known as RunBase Central, will feature key moments in race history along with an archive featuring every participant since the marathon's inception. Interactive 3D gear cases with transparent touch screens will feature the latest Adidas footwear.



Visitors can run any part of the 26.2 miles of the race route with visuals and terrain that simulates every step of the course on the official treadmill. For the first time, all race results of every single person who has run the Boston Marathon will be digitized into a single database for search and interaction with RunBase Central.

The space will feature community runs, expert speakers, visits from elite athletes, training plan assistance and nutrition education. A changing room with lockers and showers are even available as runners will be able to use the facility as a base for informal runs. Supported by Marathon Sports, the 2,000-square-foot space will sell a range of Adidas product.

"RunBase is a one-of-a-kind resource for runners based in and traveling to Boston," said Mikal Peveto, global director of running innovation at Adidas.

Boston is the first of several RunBase locations in the works for the U.S. As part of Adidas' 2020 strategic business plan, RunBase will play an important role in increasing its presence in key U.S. cities. There are currently six RunBase locations in Tokyo, Moscow, London, São Paulo, Prague and the Nordics with other locations planned around the world in the next year.



A man and a woman are running on a rocky, uneven trail. The woman is in the foreground, wearing a bright blue long-sleeved shirt and black leggings. The man is slightly behind her, wearing an orange long-sleeved shirt and black shorts. They are both looking down at the ground as they run. The background is a vast, hilly landscape with reddish-brown soil, typical of a volcanic area. The sky is overcast with soft, grey clouds.

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## BERN LAUNCHES FIRST WOMEN'S BIKE-SPECIFIC HELMETS

Famed for its core snowsport and urban bicycle helmets, Bern is launching its first women's bike-specific helmets: the Melrose and Prescott. The Melrose is a soft-brim helmet speaking to the urban female rider, and the Prescott is an enduro-style lid intended for mountain bikers.

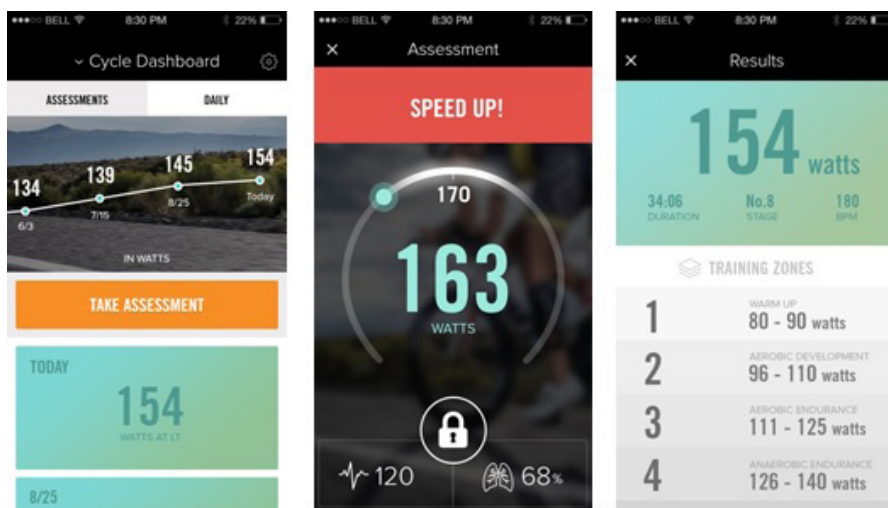
The helmets offer a higher cut in the back to allow for a ponytail and use softer lines that address feminine fashion cues. Both models use Bern's proprietary Zip Mold Plus foam and have a high strength-to-weight ratio, strategically tapered in a 15- percent lighter shell. Comfort innovations include 16 ergonomically placed vents as well as Bern's first partnership with Boa Closure System.



## BSXINSIGHT OFFERS WEARABLE, NON-INVASIVE LACTATE THRESHOLD SENSOR

BSX Athletics announced its crowd-funded BSXinsight - the world's first wearable sensor to measure lactate threshold and automatically identify personalized training zones - is shipping now.

BSX Athletics is an endurance sports technology company based in Houston, TX. Their mission is to make "every athlete a personal record holder, by taking the guesswork out of training and giving athletes the most powerful information available."



The sensor is worn around the calf, pairs with user's smartphones via Bluetooth 4.0 technology, and relays information to the BSX app in real time. The data tells users what they need to do for the next six-to-eight weeks to get the most out of their training. Using optical technology, the BSXinsight reads the oxygenation level of a person's blood through the calf and then translates that information to blood lactate level.

Professional athletes have long considered lactate Threshold one of the gold standards of performance measurement. The company said BSXinsight is the only device that can measure lactate without a blood draw or performance lab visit and makes this powerful metric used by the pros accessible to every day fitness enthusiasts.

Lactate Threshold is the exercise intensity at which lactate acid accumulates in the blood stream faster than the body can clear it. The ability to maintain the same level of workout intensity with a lower amount of lactate production demonstrates an improvement in fitness.

"All the fitness trackers currently available are retroactive, they relay an isolated number like steps or calories which represent what you've done in the past but say nothing about what you should do in the future," said BSX Athletics CEO, Dustin Freckleton. "BSXinsight enables people to train smarter because it's the only device of its kind that looks forward; it identifies optimal future training zones based on current fitness capacity and physiology."

The BSXinsight is currently available at [bsxinsight.com](http://bsxinsight.com) in a running, \$300, cycling, \$370, and multisport, \$420, edition.





Dogma K8-S

## TEAM SKY TO DEBUT K8-S AT TOUR OF FLANDERS

The Dogma K8-S continues the collaboration between Pinarello, Team Sky and Jaguar Land Rover. This new frame is derived from the highly successful Dogma F8 and the Dogma K. The K8-S borrows the aerodynamic FlatBack tube shapes from the F8 and introduces a suspension element to tackle the pavé.

The K8-S was first introduced to Team Sky in January, with Bradley Wiggins and others riding recon on the last 130 km of the Paris-Roubaix course.

The first challenge was to create a suspended road bike frame under one kilogram, and the Dogma K8-S frame set weighs in at 990 grams including suspension (53 cm without paint).

The Dogma K8-S's chainstays are designed to allow almost 10 mm of vertical deflection and at the same time provide enough torsional stiffness of the rear triangle for ideal power transfer.

The height of the cross sections were reduced to limit the vertical flexural inertia, while cross section width was decreased to increase the lateral stiffness and contain the loss of torsional stiffness due to the reduced height.

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## GIVING BACK

# Specialized Foundation Formed to Tackle ADHD

By Thomas J. Ryan

To debut its newly formed 501(c)(3) that will fund research and programs to improve kid's lives through cycling, Specialized dispatched representatives from The Specialized Foundation in February to the Partnership for a Healthier Summit in Washington D.C., to engage with leaders and community influencers and collaborate on how to create a healthier future.

Last year, Specialized sponsored groundbreaking research and pilot programs with middle schools across the U.S., which is showing early indications that kids with attention issues, and even those without, who take part in cycling activities, may better prepare their brains for learning. These early results prompted the company to form The Specialized Foundation.

"As a company of passionate riders, we intuitively recognize the benefits of exercise and cycling on our own abilities to focus, but we were astounded by the results of the study as a potential new symptom management tool for children and their families to consider," said Mike Sinyard, founder and CEO of Specialized. "As someone who is personally affected as a parent of a child diagnosed with ADHD, I hope this research provides new hope for children and their families managing attention deficit disorders and that it serves as a catalyst for prioritizing physical education in our schools."

To better understand the benefits and the science behind it, Specialized reached out to RTSG Neuroscience Consultants to research how cycling may be a non-pharmacological option for children to help manage attention difficulties and symptoms of ADHD. The initial study

scientifically measured the effects of cycling on the attention capacity of 47 students ages 11 to 14 years old from Kennedy and Wilson Middle Schools in Natick, MA. Participants biked outdoors five days per week for 30 minutes before school, for one month. The project examined cognitive, emotional/social, as well as balance and physical changes, before, during and after the program.

The study found that the cycling program led to an increase in positive mood, improvements in several aspects of attention, as well as acute and longer-term benefits in cognition.

"These findings are profound and have the potential to change the way we manage symptoms of children with attention deficit disorders/difficulties," said Dr. Lindsay Thornton, a sports psychologist with RSTG specializing in brain imaging techniques, sports science and physical performance measures. "The findings also indicated there may be factors more unique to cycling that make it especially effective when it comes to the brain benefits of exercise."

Going forward, The Specialized Foundation will work with schools and its local bike shops to implement cycling curriculum in PE programs. The goal is that by offering a research-proven method for improving the learning environment, kids' will find increased academic success through an activity they love. ■



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Photos courtesy Asics

## ASICS BUILDS NEW FOUNDATION FOR GROWTH

By Thomas J. Ryan

Asics America opened its new headquarters in Irvine, CA, last month and SGB was on hand for an exclusive interview with Kevin Wulff, Asics America's president and CEO since August 2010.

The new campus comprises about 120,000 square feet, with the latest in workstation technology designed to support employee interaction and collaboration and, ultimately, innovation, recruitment and productivity.

It also includes a state-of-the-art Sports Performance Center to support its sponsored-athletes and inspire employees with a fitness center, gym, basketball court, batting cage, volleyball courts, wrestling mats and bleacher seating.

With its employee count growing exponentially over the last five years, Asics America was outgrowing its old space. The region's sales have doubled over the last five years to \$1.1 billion in 2014, beating its goal of reaching \$1 billion by 2015. Running footwear, its core category, grew 11.7 percent in 2014. Newer categories such as training, volleyball and tennis also saw double-digit year-over-year gains. Its lifestyle footwear category, which includes Onitsuka Tiger, grew 48 percent. Apparel and accessories continued to exceed expectations and surpassed projections by double and triple-digits.



Kevin Wulff,  
President and CEO,  
Asics America

### What does this new campus mean to Asics America?

It means that we are now a player to be reckoned with. Our employees deserve an environment that takes them to heights of creativity and communication. But we want to keep growing. We're

committed to being a major player in this industry.

**What does it say to outsiders?** It helps define us as more of multi-sport brand, particularly with the training center. We're able to train athletes for so many different sports and the training center inspires people around sports every day. We also gain all the benefits of testing elite athletes in our product, and great photography. But it shows that we are a multisport, not just a running brand.

**What's been the key to Asics' accelerated growth over the last five years?** It's a lot of the same things we always do. But we've just really developed a

strategic framework, which we never had before. We hunkered down to focus and prioritize on what we felt we wanted to own and what we wanted to probe to learn what might be potential opportunities down the road. And we really focused on running from top to bottom – not just performance, but on Vis-Tech, lightweight, as well as other areas such as kids. We've also always been known as a product-centric company, but we've become more marketing driven and launched some really big campaigns.

**Asics' running business remains healthy, growing double-digits last year. But Brooks, becoming the lead brand in the run specialty channel, keeps coming up. Has your approach to run changed?** Our goal in run specialty was never to be the largest. It's always been to be the best. So there are some surveys where we're number one, in some we're number two. But to us it doesn't really matter. It's about being the best. We've got a lot of new products we'll be launching soon that will really be focused on running specialty. At the Asics LA Marathon, we've got a large group of our Gold Accounts attending, getting their insights, building those relationships, and planning together. So if we're good or great,





the growth always comes. But the big thing with us in running was we really doubled our commitment about four or five years ago to good service – the ability to deliver on time and accurate as well as to fill-in. We also now have a state-of-the-art distribution center that's completely automated. So we fixed a lot of those operational things that frustrated our Gold Accounts.

**How is the brand doing in run specialty?** We've gained some market share, and we're excited about it. I think some of the new products we've come out with have created some energy. Our running brand campaign, "It's A Big World. Go Run It," has seen an amazing response. We think as one of the running leaders, or the running leader, part of our responsibility is to create that energy, to create that emotional connection to the sport of running and to the running enthusiast. So doing a running-specific campaign should bring some motivation along with it and should be good for the running category as a whole.

**Can you talk about your recent growth in training?** It was definitely underserved, and we put more focus on it. Running is normally a part of someone's training. It makes training that much easier. You see many fitness club members already wearing our shoes, so it's a nice complement to running. Training is also very segmented, so there's opportunities across every type of fitness – studio training, yoga, sports training for a particular sport, CrossFit, etc. So we've got a great lineup of product that aligns to training very well.

**Can you discuss your progress in apparel?** We've come a long way. We hit \$100 million in the Americas in the category this past year including a 34 percent gain year-over-year. We have a new head of apparel who is doing a great job and bringing new energy and a new design direction. A lot of people only know us as a footwear brand, but we have a lot of opportunity and runway ahead of us in apparel.

**What's driving tennis?** Tennis is exploding for us. We went from nowhere to number two or three depending on the survey this past December. We're now number one in tennis specialty and tennis e-commerce. We've got really good athletes, but we've been in the top men's and women's tennis shoe over the last four years in *Tennis Magazine's* annual buyers guide. That's indicative of the quality of all the performance attributes we built into this product.

**The Lifestyle business is also undergoing a resurgence.** We're going to be growing another 40 percent this year. We just re-launched the AT or Asics Tiger collection and if you read some of the sneaker blogs, we're the

hottest thing going. We've kept distribution very narrow, so we're keeping our brands at the top of the pyramid and they're getting to the point where they're becoming very meaningful.

**Asics America opened 11 stores last year, including a flagship in Times Square. Why the expansion?** We'd gotten into the factory outlets as most of the brands have. It's a great way to liquidate product but also a great way to tell our story in a proper manner, too, even though the product is discounted to some degree. And now we've got 12 inline stores, and they're just great laboratories to learn for us. We're also selling a tremendous amount of apparel in those stores. So it balances out that portfolio, and consumers know that we're more than just running footwear. We're telling stories for running, training and tennis and so on, and are able to tell our story with other categories like apparel and accessories.

**Any more openings planned?** We don't have any currently planned. We're going to try to keep what we have, get better at it, and then look at expanding some more.

**What do you make of the consolidation in run specialty with Finish Line's Running Specialty Group and others?** Overall, the evolution is done for a reason, and I think good retailers will always be good retailers. No matter what their size or the amount of stores, they're going to build their traffic base, their conversions, and they're going to be fine. I think that a lot of consolidation is really about providing that efficiency, the knowledge and best practices to help stores compete in today's environment. The good retailers tend to come out of it in a much stronger position.

**What's the next category for Asics?** We can't talk about it yet. We'll try to announce something soon. We'll bring some new innovation and technologies we think will be special. And just like we've always done, we'll start at the grassroots level, getting players involved at a pretty young age and give us some feedback and just grow from there.

**Does Asics need a new category to keep its growth momentum?** We have a lot of opportunity with our other newer categories and in other segments of running such as the Vis-Tech segment, which is for a younger consumer, and the Active Running segment, which is under \$100 and lightweight. In kids running, we're just scratching the surface. We're growing like crazy. So just in running, there's still a lot we can do. ■





## The Man Behind Superfeet University: Sitting Down with Superfeet's Jeff Gray

By Thomas J. Ryan

THE FIT GURU, WHO RUNS SUPERFEET UNIVERSITY, HAS BEEN WITH THE ICONIC INSOLE BRAND SINCE THE BEGINNING.

In an all too familiar scenario, Jeff Gray, director of education for Ferndale, WA-based Superfeet, learned about insoles by getting injured.

"I was a senior in high school and that year I had torn some cartilage and ligaments in my knee and could only ski for maybe half a day on a Saturday and maybe half a day on a Sunday," said Gray, who this year will be celebrating his 38th year with Superfeet.

And like many, the path to insoles was shown through advice from a friend. In Gray's case, it was Sven Coomer, the acclaimed designer of some of the most iconic ski boots and boot-fitting products in skiing history. The eventual founder of ZipFit ski boot liners, Coomer began with Nordica in the late 1960s amid the industry's transition from leather to plastic shell designs and came to know Gray's parents, who ran a junior ski club from 1966 to 1979 in the San Francisco Bay Area called Huski Ski Club.

Coomer introduced Gray to a Superfeet Kork footbed at time the company was just getting started and he was immediately able to ski all day and performance was also greatly improved.

"Superfeet literally took my knee pain away in one day and prior to that I was struggling to do a sport I had a deep passion for," said Gray.

When he was 13, Coomer properly fitted him with a Nordica Astral GT ski boot, and the boot "leapfrogged my ski ability a tremendous amount." He went from "doing okay" in junior racing to achieving a low handicap in NASTAR.

"Sven phenomenally increased my ski ability through proper equipment - not just a ski lesson. So that was pretty eye opening," said Gray. "I thought ski boots were supposed to hurt. 'If your feet didn't hurt you, you weren't doing it right,' I thought. So he adjusted my boots and I thought, 'I better

learn how to do this because Sven's not always going to be there to look after my boot fit."

Gray began working for the Harry Leonard and Jerry Simon ski shows, which led him to the opportunity to work for Jerry Simon's skiing mechanic workshops in the 70s with notables such as Fred Schwacke, Doug Killam and Coomer.

"I suddenly didn't have to take a pill to get through the day and I was like, 'Wait a minute, the foot bone's connected to the ankle bone, the ankle bone's connect to the shin bone, the shin bone's connected to the knee bone' - Bingo!" Gray reflected.

Coomer first met Dennis Brown, who established Northwest Podiatric Lab in the early 60s and founded Superfeet in 1977, when he was looking for an orthotic foot alignment for a Nordica ski boot. With Brown coming up with the boot extender tools, Coomer subsequently became one of the original partners in Superfeet.

Right out of high school, Gray began working alongside Coomer conducting Superfeet training clinics for ski boots in the San Francisco Bay area, essentially working as an independent rep. At the same time, Gray, along with Coomer and a few others, opened Footloose Sports in Mammoth Lakes, CA. During these years, he also met Chris Smith, Brown's other initial partner who taught podiatric biomechanics at the California College Of Podiatric Medicine in San Francisco.

In classic start-up fashion, Gray worked for about six months without pay. Any revenue coming in was plowed into getting molds made, purchasing raw materials and creating brochures. Footloose Sports was the testing ground for designs. Gray wound up collecting unemployment and was even on food stamps for a while during the 1979/80 winter. But he had faith that partnering with Brown, Smith and Coomer would pay off.

"I understood why I wasn't getting paid and I trusted that I would be taken care of," said Gray. "And I have to tell you everything Dennis said he would do for me he has done and far more."



With the breakthrough introduction of the Insta-Ski-Thotic, Superfeet orthotics and ski boot fitting systems became the rage of the 1980s. With success in ski, Superfeet next found success in hiking, establishing the insole category at REI and the outdoor channel. Gray crisscrossed the country explaining with a custom fit boot and shoe program for independent retailers "to learn how to use the Brannock device and learn how to measure feet and make hiking boots comfortable so they could finish the Appalachian Trail without blisters, lacerations, fractures or sprains."

Breakthroughs such as the Bauer Supreme 100 in 1979 was followed the next year by the SoftRunner, the first trim-to-fit insole that eventually became Green, its biggest seller that propelled Superfeet into the run space. In 1993, its ambitious Trim-to-Fit Program launched and Superfeet was gaining wide recognition across outdoor and sports activities.

## SUPERFEET UNIVERSITY IS BORN

Critical to Superfeet's success was the founders' establishment in 1977 of an early education program to offer as a clinic to explain orthotic insoles at a time when few knew of their benefits. With the effort eventually led by Gray, Superfeet wound up developing and standardizing the fit protocols for retailers use across categories.

"We had to teach running, hiking and hockey retailers and everybody else the importance of the fit process," said Gray. "It wasn't just, 'Stand on this Brannock; you're a 9, I'll be right back.' Whether it's a hockey skate, a hiking boot or a running shoe, it's the foot, the insole, the sock, the Brannock, and then the shoe. Superfeet was an educational company that happened to produce an insole which changed people's life and created sales."

Traveling the country from the late 70s to 1988, Gray work for Superfeet and Footloose in Mammoth Lakes California teaching boot fitting and custom Superfeet fabrication. Gray formally joined Superfeet in 1988 and conducted clinics across the U.S. and Canada on a shoe-string budget.

After moving into its Ferndale, WA headquarters in 1993, the first Superfeet University was established in 1994. It featured a dedicated training area with a workbench, tools and custom and Trim-to-Fit products. Visits and the classes

lasting two to three days continue to set the standard for educating retail partners.

With education coming from medical practitioners and specialists, stores and the pervasive ads by Dr. Scholl's, people know much more about orthotics than those early days, according to Gray. What hasn't changed too much is that people often continue to endure foot pain without taking steps to resolve the cause of the problems.

"The first thing people do when they get home is they put their feet up," remarked Gray. "They don't put their shoulder up or their elbow up. They put their feet up. We take our foot pain or our feet period and ignore them. We put them in our subconscious until we have a foot injury and we limp to a specialist."

Education also remains a challenge with many misperceptions continuing across the marketplace.

One misperception is that the shoe doesn't need an orthotic because it already keeps the foot from overpronating or oversupinating. Keep in mind these two terms are commonly misused however they are relative terms and there is no basis for measurement. Gray said insoles should be viewed as "timing devices" because they help with the timing and rate at which the bones move in the foot.

"Superfeet allows your foot to move more efficiently in the right direction," said Gray. "It doesn't stop the foot from moving. It repositions your foot in a healthier position inside whatever shoe you choose and it gets the foot moving in the right direction at the right time for the event you're doing."

Relatedly, the insole won't prevent the foot from pronating or supinating, another misunderstanding.

"Pronation is a healthy thing and we need it to happen but we need it to happen within a certain timeline and if it passes that timeline it stays there too long, that's when you're prone to injury," said Gray.

Ideally, an insole allows the foot to pronate but gets it to re-supinate just after heel contact to allow the foot to convert to a rigid lever for push-off. Said Gray, "if you think of soft sand at the beach, your foot steps in that and it stays pronated. The timing is now off and you have to work twice as hard to get out of the sand. So there's not a shoe in the world that can take the place of an orthotic." On the other hand, an

orthotic doesn't work without a good shoe, he noted.

That lesson was again learned with the recent trend around minimalist running shoes, which Gray likened to many of the running shoes that first arrived in the seventies. Much like that seventies, resultant injuries included Achilles tendinitis, runners knee and stress fractures rather than typical issues such as calluses and corns.

Gray believes the industry won't know the "true impact" of the barefoot running or minimalist craze until after all the research is done but the injuries show at least it's essential to slowly transition to such shoes. Overall, he likes shoes to be torsionally supportive.

"Keep the shoes light but get it to flex where the foot flexes and get it to work with the foot," said Gray. "It can't be all about lightweight and lower to the ground. Some people don't have flexibility in their hamstrings and calf muscles and if you drop that heel too quickly, you can get Achilles tendinitis. If you drop it slowly, it might get rid of it. The best shoe you need is the one that fits and function as well for your biomechanics."

In Superfeet's clinics, Gray tries to get two major points across. The first is that you can't guarantee the fit of any shoe, boot, skate etc. at retail without stabilizing the foot. Said Gray, "If the foot continues to move around in the footwear environment, it's just bouncing off the guard rails."

The second message he emphasizes is that every foot can benefit from a good orthotic. Depending on the shape and the foot's biomechanics, an insole can reposition the foot to greatly improve the fit of the shoe. But even a foot with generally healthy biomechanics, it can provide an extra level of comfort. Said Gray, "Superfeet is the bridge that takes that mass-produced product, that shoe, and matches it to that un-massed produced product, the foot."

Despite the struggles of ever-changing retail, getting the fit message across, Gray still loves his job.

"I get to change lives every day and it's not with a pill or a scalpel," said Gray. "My job is take your foot pain away at whatever effort or cost. And if I don't do that, I haven't done my job. So I think I have one of the best jobs in the world because I get to hopefully change the world one foot at a time." ■





I AM... SGB

## Lance Muzslay

### Co-Owner Sole Sports Tempe, AZ

Growing up in Ocean City, NJ, Lance Muzslay - who is now one of the co-owners of Tempe, Arizona's Sole Sports Running Zone - got his start picking up trash off the beaches during the early morning hours on the Jersey Shore. When he wasn't busy working for the public works department, he was swimming in the open ocean, playing sports, winning races, went on to work as a lifeguard, and was eventually inspired to participate in Triathlon, where he competed for more than 15 years.

**What is your proudest athletic moment?** Winning my age group at Ironman Hawaii in 1995.

**Prior to getting into the running business in 2002, you were an engineer in the semiconductor industry. Why the career change?** After six years as an engineer I was a little burned out and looking to make a career change when a friend started up a new running store. In the process of helping him get things rolling we discovered that our skill sets complimented each other and he invited me to become his business partner. It went well for a couple of years but the partnership eventually went bad and we went our separate ways after five years.

**How did Sole Sports arrive in 2007?** When my first partner and I split we had two stores. I kept the one that was less than a year old and partnered up with Karen Seymour. We renamed the store Sole Sports and essentially started from scratch with vendors, employees, etc.

**How do you and Karen complement each other?** I handle more of the back office operations and I.T., while Karen manages front of the house. Karen has great instincts and we find it very helpful to have one another to talk through decisions.

**How does Sole Sports Running stand out?** We put a lot of emphasis on social events centered around our stores, as many other run specialty stores do, but we tend to take them to a relatively high level. For example, one of our most popular events is called Sole 2 Sole. It's an 18-mile social run between our Scottsdale and Tempe stores in which we rent a double decker bus to transport people from the finish to the start so that their cars are waiting for them at the end. We follow the run with breakfast and beers at a local bar. Karen and I put a big emphasis on taking initiative and empower our team to make decisions on their own. We have a horizontal organizational structure with an outstanding team of senior staff, but there are no official managers. We developed sophisticated inventory management systems, which are powerful for optimizing ordering and distributing inventory among our three locations. We've been into omni-channel since we opened and although our online sales pale in comparison to our in-store sales, online has been a valuable tool for moving out old product.

**What do you like most and least about your job?** I really enjoy the people I get to work with every day. We have a very close knit team that has a lot of fun together. I also enjoy trying to figure out ways to make our stores operate more efficiently. I have a passion for working with data and software and am always trying to leverage those things to deliver a better experience to our customers.

**What's the craziest run you've been on?** I was hiking from Havasu Falls toward the Colorado River when I got caught in a surprise thunderstorm. I had to run for about an hour back to camp through thick brush under lightning and cold rain and had anything bad happened, I may not have been found.

**What's the biggest lesson you've learned through running?** Have patience and always enjoy the journey.

**How would your friends describe you?** More laid back and fun loving than meets the eye.

**What would the industry be surprised to know about you?** I love to surf. Unfortunately it's not something I get to do often living in Arizona.

**Did you have any mentors during your career?** My parents were big influences on me with regards to work ethic and education. I can't thank them enough.

**What book are you reading?** I'm currently reading "The Charisma Myth." I'm naturally more of an introvert and this book is giving me a different perspective than what comes naturally.

**Who's the businessperson you most admire?** Jack Welch. I listened to his audio books and found them very engaging. I admire his rise to CEO from engineer and his fearless and pragmatic approach to his work.

**How do runners handle the heat in Arizona?** Good hydration is essential during our warm months. We carry a wide variety of hydration products so we can find a solution for everyone. Arizona runners handle the heat better than people would expect. Our group runs stay busy throughout the summer even when temperatures exceed 100 degrees.

**What drives you?** I never take our success for granted, especially with the rapidly changing nature of retail. I'm always striving to make our operations and community connections stronger. ■



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