

lifestyles Husker Rehab

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KIM QUADE

Mike Zalman and Greg Cromer, partners in Husker Rehabilitation and Wellness Center, don't classify themselves as entrepreneurs. "We're just doers," Zalman says.

From the time they were in junior high, both Mike Zalman and Greg Cromer knew they wanted to become physical therapists. Although they grew up in two different small towns in Nebraska, they shared similar dreams of business ownership.

Introduced to each other in 1997 by a physician known to both, Zalman of Lincoln and Cromer of Fairbury, also discovered they shared similar treatment philosophies; they became good friends and partners. After research and preparation, they opened Husker Rehabilitation and Wellness Center at 4911 N. 26th St. in Lincoln in March 1999. Cromer had been operating a clinic in Fairbury since 1995. In March 2000, they opened another branch in Beatrice, following through on their commitment to provide quality rehabilitation services to small communities.

The three clinics provide such services as injury rehabilitation, sports training, massage therapy, pre- and postnatal therapy and return-to-work evaluations.

In addition to their commitment to rural towns, Zalman and Cromer share common treatment strategies. The crux of their practice centers on treating the cause of the pain, not just the symptoms. Each new

patient undergoes a postural screening—determining how a person's postural muscles control their body.

"A lot of what ails you is based on your postural position," Zalman says. "Oftentimes, correcting the postural position eliminates a patient's pain."

Both also employ a manual, hands-on approach to evaluation and treatment. They use their hands to assess and re-assess a body's muscles and joints.

Zalman and Cromer say their primary goal is to help each patient improve and get well. Their patients are satisfied. Travis Tonkinson, a freshman at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, says he's been a patient of Zalman's off and on for five years. Suffering from chronic knee issues, Tonkinson visits Husker Rehabilitation to help him recover after surgeries. "I always get back to 100 percent after surgery; Mike always fixes me up," he says. "The people here at Husker Rehabilitation are top-notch."

Marilyn and Junior Cerveney of rural Reynolds have the same good things to say about Cromer. In their 70s, both of the Cervenys have sought Cromer's services since he arrived in Fairbury in 1995. "We think he's great; we really do," says Marilyn, who has suffered with back problems. "I think we're fortunate to have such good physical therapy services here in Fairbury."

Zalman and Cromer say they're able to provide top-notch services to people such as Tonkinson and the Cervenys because of two things—the support from their families and the commitment from all of the employees in the three clinic locations—about 30 full- and part-timers. "We have employees who go above and beyond what we ask," Cromer says.

"They are at work to help people, not just put in their time."

Helping people was the impetus for each of Zalman's and Cromer's decision to become physical therapists.

Zalman graduated from Red Cloud (Neb.) High School in 1987. He attended UNL and was earning a teaching certificate when he was accepted into physical therapy school at the Kansas University Medical Center. He graduated from there in 1994 and worked at Lincoln General Hospital for five years before forming Husker Rehabilitation.

From the time he was a youngster working on his family's farm, Zalman knew he wanted to own his own business. While in seventh grade, he became acquainted with a burn patient. He realized the good one can accomplish with the proper training. He was hoping to merge the two goals.

Cromer grew up in Utica, Neb., graduating from both Centennial High School and Hastings College. He earned a master's degree in physical therapy from Washington University in St. Louis, Mo. He worked at an outpatient clinic before returning to Nebraska in 1995 to raise a family and fulfill his dream of being his own boss. Cromer was contracting physical, occupational and speech therapy to the Jefferson Community Health Center in Fairbury before meeting Zalman and opening Husker Rehabilitation.

Cromer had had some personal experience with injured athletes and with veterans. "I was always amazed to see the improvements in their health," he says.

It's important for Cromer and Zalman to be their own bosses. "We're not limited to what we can do," Cromer says. "We can do



outreach. We can try new things."

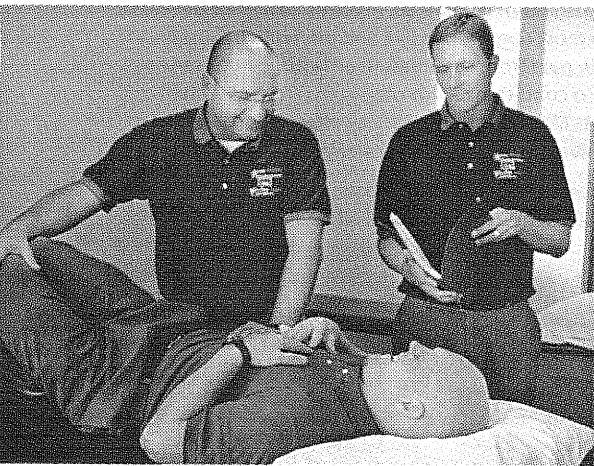
They don't classify themselves as entrepreneurs. "We're just doers," Zalman says. "We see a need and try to solve that need. We want to create opportunities and make decisions for ourselves."

They've had several opportunities to contribute to communities and serve patients. In March in Beatrice they formed Husker Health Services, which contracts with area businesses to conduct pre-employment screening, toxicology tests, injury triage, ergonomics, work-site evaluations and employee rehabilitation. Also part of the Beatrice clinic is Husker Performance, a cutting-edge acceleration program for athletes. That's a segment of the business they would like to expand to their Lincoln clinic. And, in Lincoln, they've added a physical therapist certified in women's health issues.

Both say their work is more than just a job. "We have a passion for what we do," Zalman says. "We love what we do. It's not work for us."

Office manager Patty Gerlach, who has worked at the Lincoln clinic since its inception, agrees. "Both of them care so deeply about what they do and how they do it. They truly care about their patients and their employees. This is not just a business for them; it's much more than that."

They all care about one thing: Making patients well. L



Top right: Husker Rehab partners Greg Cromer (left) and Mike Zalman. Above: Mike Zalman and Greg Cromer evaluate Josh ten Bensele, an exercise management major at UNL.