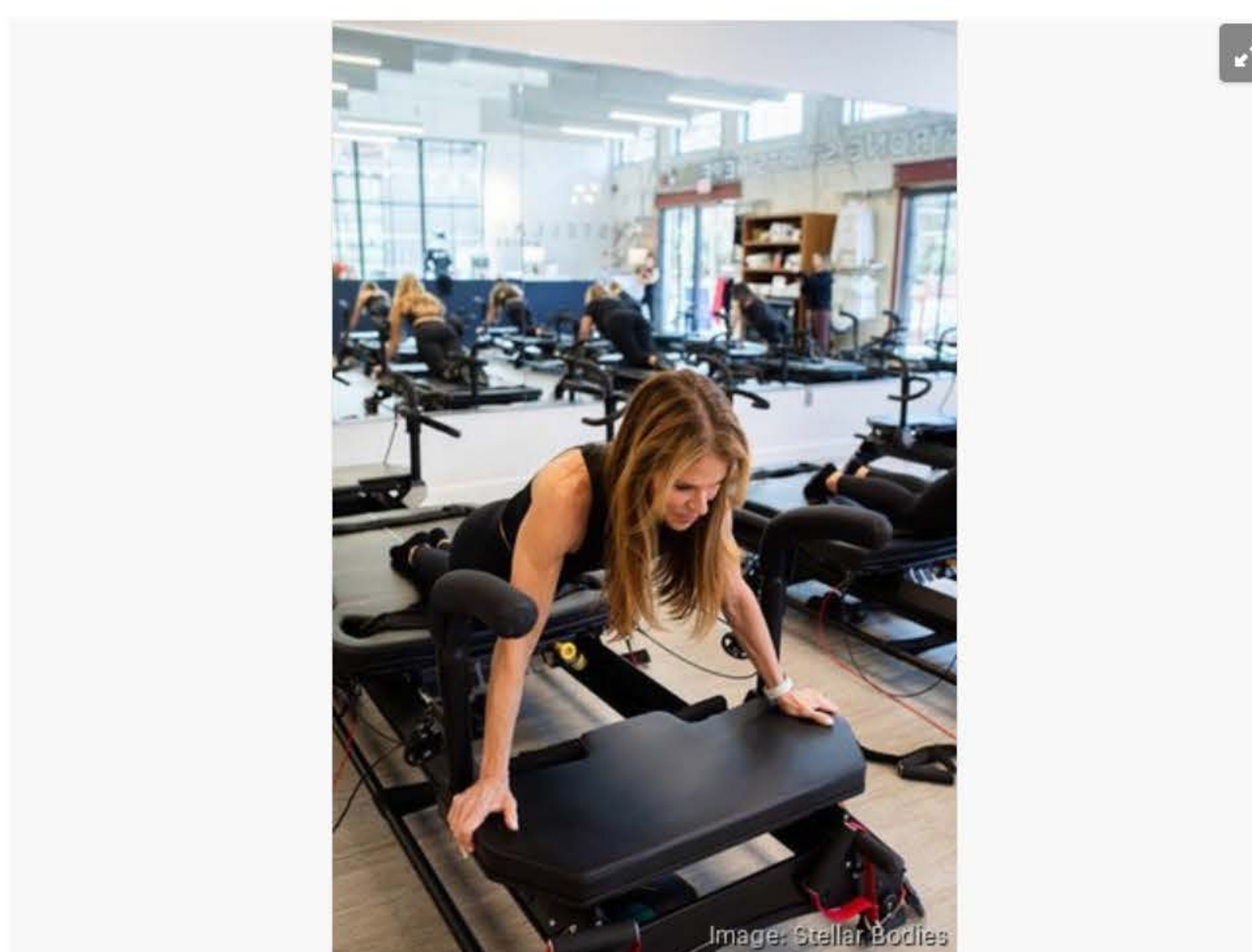


No pain, no gain: Fitness entrepreneurs share origin stories, insights on staying competitive

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For better or worse, as a business owner, "you are fully responsible for everything; there is nobody to back you up," says Amy Selig, owner of Stellar Bodies.

COURTESY OF AMY SELIG, STELLAR BODIES

By Rebecca Wilbert – Contributing Writer, Atlanta Business Chronicle
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With New Year's resolutions about to go full throttle, the fitness industry is gearing up for its busiest time of year.

Four Atlanta entrepreneurs spoke with Atlanta Business Chronicle about their fitness businesses, how they plan to capitalize on January excitement and fitness trends they'll be watching in 2026.

Amy Selig, owner of Stellar Bodies

Small group fitness was taking off in 2007, and then-personal trainer Amy Selig was looking for her own spin on the trend.

She went hiking while on vacation in Arizona, and a fellow hiker invited her to an exercise class. The class – a mix of strength training and Pilates that used the Lagree method – was just what Selig had in mind.

With a licensing agreement to use Lagree's training and equipment, Selig started Stellar Bodies. Selig has since evolved the workout and machine and parted ways with Lagree. She's also added retail, including brands like Beyond Yoga and FREECITY. She has two locations – at The Works in West Midtown and on Roswell Road.

On a recent Tuesday afternoon, Selig, 57, was at the Roswell location, which is open and airy, with the boutique and workout area blending. High-energy music accompanies classes, as an instructor walks around between the machines and provides instructions.

When asked the pros and cons of being a business owner, Selig said the biggest pro is "flexibility and freedom – you can decide if you want to work hard or not." The con: "You are fully responsible for everything; there is nobody to back you up."

She said 75% of revenue comes from group fitness, 5% from private lessons, and 20% from retail. The highest cost is rent.

For better or worse, entrepreneurship was perhaps inevitable for Selig.

"My grandfather used to say, 'Whatever it is, I want you to own it, even if it's a peanut shack.'"

Jamie Bodner, owner of Pinnacle Fitness



Jamie Bodner, owner of Pinnacle Fitness, says the most rewarding part of his job is "seeing people excel."

COURTESY OF JAMIE BODNER, PINNACLE FITNESS

In 3,500 square feet of no-nonsense gym space tucked between Roswell and Piedmont roads, Jamie Bodner and his team of personal trainers work with clients, ranging from tweens to an 85-year-old, who twice a week focus on strength and balance.

Bodner, 49, started Pinnacle Fitness in 2008 because of his love of fitness.

"A lot of positive things in my life, I would attribute, one way or another, to fitness," he said.

Pinnacle has 200 consistent active clients. A typical client spends \$600 per month. The hardest part is human resources and keeping up with "all the details," Bodner said. The most rewarding part is "seeing people excel."

Bodner has big plans for Pinnacle in 2026: an additional trainer; new programs in which clients alternate between long, slow workouts and short, intense workouts; a VO2 max machine; and a separate room for physical therapy. He expects current fitness trends to continue, including a focus on longevity.

Genie Beaver, owner of West Stride



When Genie Beaver (far left) opened West Stride in 2008, her goal was a running store that catered to a broader audience than men focused on road races.

COURTESY OF GENIE BEAVER, WEST STRIDE

Genie Beaver was always a runner. She ran cross-country in high school and then at Georgetown University. After college, she went to business school, worked in banking and then became a franchisee for a junk-hauling business. But her passion for running never left.

She wanted a career "that lit the fire in me," and in 2008 she started the running store West Stride. At the time, running stores mostly catered to men and were focused on road races. She wanted to make running more inclusive.

West Stride, located right off West Paces Ferry Road, has a friendly staff, walls lined with shoes and racks of trendy athletic apparel. The technology includes a machine to scan your feet and a treadmill to test different shoes.

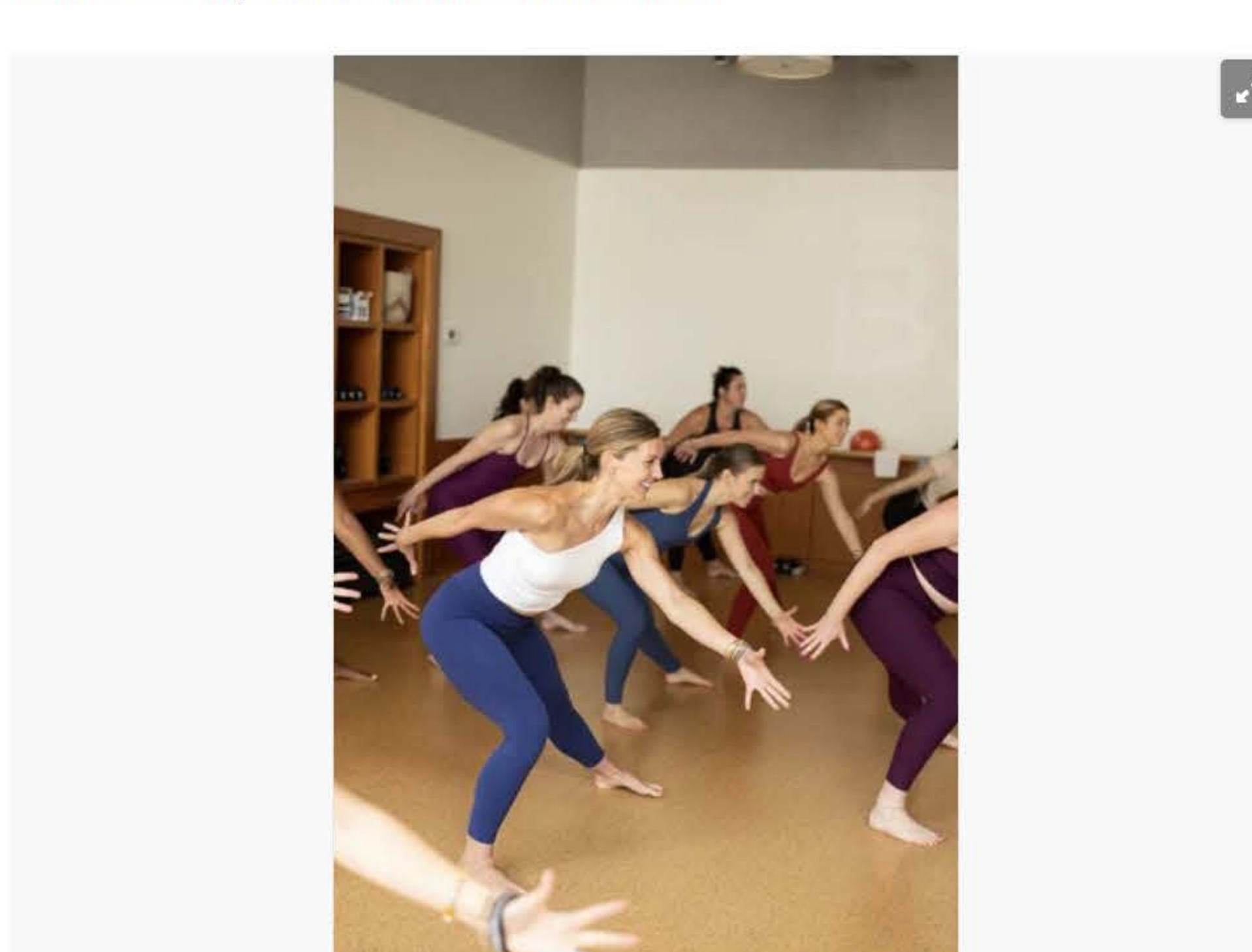
West Stride participates in running events, hoping to build goodwill and encourage new customers to visit the store, and it also partners with vendors on activations. Before the Peachtree Road Race, West Stride partnered with Tracksmith on Tuesday runs at 5:30 a.m. that drew more than 60 participants.

"The sun came up, it was a beautiful morning, and it was a great sense of community," Beaver said.

To support people in their New Year's resolutions, West Stride will once again host its annual "Frozen Feet" challenge. Participants must run or walk at least one mile outside every day from Jan. 10 through Feb. 7. Sponsored by Hoka, an end-of-the-challenge party will include prizes.

Beaver, 53, seated in the back room of the store, surrounded by shoeboxes ready to be sold, said, "I love what we've built." She hopes that Atlanta will continue to have locally owned businesses that foster a connection to the city, just like West Stride has.

Landis Reese, owner of Barre3 Buckhead



Landis Reese was teaching at Barre3 Buckhead in 2018 when she seized on an opportunity to buy it.

COURTESY OF LANDIS REESE, BARRE 3

Wearing royal blue leggings and a white tank top, hair in a ponytail, Landis Reese, 35, recently took a Saturday 8 a.m. class before strapping on a headset to teach her own class at 9 a.m.

In 2018, Reese, a certified yoga instructor who had tried all kinds of group fitness classes, was teaching part time at Barre3 Buckhead. She heard the owner wanted to sell. As fate would have it, Reese had just unexpectedly lost her virtual job.

"With a lot of courage, an SBA loan, and the support of my family and friends, I went for it," she said. "Honestly, it still feels pretty surreal."

Barre3 is a mix of strength, cardio and mindfulness. Instructors encourage participants, almost all women, to take up space and thank their bodies. About 70% of revenue comes from members who pay a monthly fee for unlimited classes.

Reese says one benefit of being a franchisee – instead of creating her own brand – is support from the company and other owners. "We share ideas, learn from each other and really inspire one another," Reese said. The downsides: franchise fees and the challenge of establishing brand recognition in Atlanta for Portland-based Barre3.

As Reese led her sold-out class through lunges and ab work, her 2-year-old daughter was in the studio's play lounge.

"I love that she's growing up around this community," Reese said.