

Kitsap Sun

NEWS

Bainbridge Island friends turn hobby into business plan with sauna-and-plunge idea



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BAINBRIDGE ISLAND - A group of women gather in a cozy, mobile sauna, chatting excitedly about their interests, kids and lives. A beach can be seen through the sauna's window, and the icy Puget Sound waves roll onto the sand as people eye the beach with an array of emotions; determination, fear, excitement.

The women leave and cross a beach near Lynwood Center, approaching the ocean's edge. Uncertain glances are cast by some, while others begin wading in decisively. Some continue lively conversations together while others venture into the water in quiet reflection. Eventually, everyone is shoulder-deep in the salty ocean water on an April afternoon.

Sara Otepka and Mikal Foushee had been part of a group of Bainbridge Islanders who met through the WhatsApp social media platform to enjoy cold plunging together. It was at a beach on Bainbridge Island that the two shifted the friendship to an entrepreneurial journey that now envelopes women (and men) like the group that April day at their new business, Fire + Floe.

Both Otepka and Foushee are mothers and were working in corporate positions at the time they met. They wanted to get out of the corporate life and dreamt about working for themselves in an industry that they felt passionate about, Otepka said. By October 2023

they had come up with the idea for Fire + Floe, a sauna-and-ocean contrast therapy experience, and began putting things into motion.

Fire + Floe is currently located on Point White Drive NE, with a mobile sauna parked behind a condo complex called The Roost, and was granted use of the land and beach access from nearby property owners.

Two types of sessions are offered at Fire + Floe: Camp Sauna and Hi-Lo Flo. Camp Sauna is contrast therapy at your own pace, meaning people can utilize the sauna and cold plunge independently during a designated time period. The Hi-Lo Flo class utilizes an instructor and begins with a guided strength workout, followed by a 20 minute sauna, and ends with a cold plunge into the ocean. Classes range from \$25 to \$35, with membership options or a private sauna rental also available.

“Our mission is to get people (to) have new and elevating experiences out in nature,” Otepka said.

Inspired by ancient practices from many different cultures around the world, this business uses contrast therapy to improve mental and physical health and wellness. Fire + Floe combines exercise, saunas and cold plunges into the Pacific Ocean to give patrons a variety of health benefits including improved circulation, stress relief, detoxification, and a boosted immune system.

“Contrast therapy... is a full mind-body-spirit workout,” Otepka said.

Saunas have been used for thousands of years across many different cultures, and have always been seen to have many health benefits. Finland’s past is steeped in sauna sessions, and much inspiration for Fire + Floe was drawn from Finnish practices, according to Otepka. Otepka and Foushee made it a priority to use a high quality sauna designed with Finnish roots, and purchased a sauna from Timber Sauna Co., a sauna design and building company in the Pacific Northwest that is passionate about making quality saunas up to Finnish standards.

Although Fire + Floe is only a month old, Otepka is already thinking big. They're working to hit a goal of 100 members, and then have plans to buy a piece of land for the business to

permanently live, and keep spreading the idea that the cold water surrounding the island can be as healing as it is beautiful.

“I really want to deliver these health benefits to people in a way that feels great,” Otepka explained. “You come and push yourself, but you leave feeling like you just went to a spa.”