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THE YEAR OF THE CORE

story by CULLEN CURTISS

According to the Chinese zodiac, it's the Year of the Dog, however, my personal zodiac informs me it's the Year of the Core. When I shared my 2018 focus with Floery Mahoney at her Da Vinci BodyBoard flagship studio in Santa Fe, we knew our meeting was kismet. Co-owner Karen Schardt and Marketing Director Lily Michaels can attest to that.

"This whole system is based on your core!" Floery says. "Since we work with multiple anchor points, your body has to ground and it must ground through the core." By system, Floery means her invention: the patented Da Vinci BodyBoard and its accompanying core-emboldening resistance-band calisthenic training regimen.

"When I turned 45, I didn't feel like me," she says. At that time, Floery, a single mom, owned and ran a demanding business in Vergennes, VT, called Daily Chocolate with ChocolateSmith Founder Chris Smith. "To feel better, I did more bootcamps, more spinning classes, and ran more miles, and yet, I was gaining weight and my body ached. I had to stop." And stop she did. Floery stopped the pounding, repetitive, time-consuming exercise and started tying resistance bands to furniture. As owner of the first Pilates studio in Vermont, she knew a thing or two about core and form.

"I would have my son sit in the chair so it wouldn't move," Floery says. "I tied bands to the bed and my boyfriend was like, 'What is going on?' But I realized it was working. I lost weight right away because I was slowing down. And more important, I was getting this connection in my body that I'd never felt before, not even when I was teaching Pilates."

Floery continued to make chocolate by day and night, but had a sense she was onto something different with the bands and the movement. "I found that if I set up a rectangular space and tied bands

around me, I could work my body with resistance in contrasting directions." She built one board, felt great, built five more, then put herself to the big test. (As a perpetual small business owner, Floery tolerates and thrives on disruptive, potentially brilliant ideas.) "I led a 'class' for some Lululemon trainer friends," she says. "Afterwards, they said, 'When can we get certified?'"

Floery patented the BodyBoard, sold Daily Chocolate, launched Da Vinci BodyBoard in 2013, and opened shop in Santa Fe in the summer of 2016 at a space attached to Railyard Fitness, and these days, her studio occupies the former Dragon Rising space in Pacheco Park. To what do we owe her choice to become a local? Floery had received her Pilates certification in the City Different more than 20 years previous. What's more, her boyfriend had hoped to come back and she felt Santa Fe would be more hospitable to a small business than Los Angeles, Calif., or Austin, TX. "Santa Fe has a lot of cache," she says. "We did the licensed model trainings for the Chicago and Ft. Collins studios here, and the instructors loved it. And I love being here; it's our home. I am grounded."

Grounded with a strong core describes Floery to a T, and is intrinsic to the promise she delivers clients who enjoy her patented system, with its similarly promising name. That part required some brainstorming. "I wanted to take all of the things in fitness that I think are out of whack. Also, I've always had this





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Left to right: Sherman (pup) with Floery Mahoney (owner); Karen Schardt (co-owner); Lily Michaels (instructor and marketing director)

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connection between art and my life.” (Floery’s former restaurant, Starry Night Café, continues to thrive in Ferrisburgh, Vermont.)

“I kept seeing flashes of the Vitruvian man and read about Da Vinci’s feelings on how the body and nature have symmetry,” she explains. “He looked at every single muscle and tendon and how they fit together. I wanted the name to suggest the importance of the entire body, instead of being bulked up in one place.” (Evidently, Da Vinci is the pre-cursor inventor of nearly everything. Go and experience *Da Vinci, The Genius* at the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science through the end of July.)

An artist in her own right, Floery designed Da Vinci BodyBoard’s logo to demonstrate the flow of movement in a gender-neutral manner and suggest the idea of reaching for a new way of moving. And new it is, though resistance bands are 100-plus-year-old physical therapy tools, cresting in popularity during the 1980s aerobics craze. But is it just a fad? Floery is emphatic when she says No.

“It’s sustainable.” The proof: affordability (classes are among the least expensive boutique studio-led options in Santa Fe, not to mention the 15-percent discounts for teachers, students, military and seniors); duration (short, productive classes for busy people); modification opportunities (multiple bands, multiple uses); and results (happy, healthy, whole people, who you’ll meet soon). Supported by research about the effectiveness of High-Intensity Interval Training, Da Vinci BodyBoard’s core class is approximately 30 minutes long with 22 one-minute moves, complemented by 22-second breaks to prepare for the next move. And then five to eight minutes to stretch, using the bands to lengthen muscles.

“Even professional athletes are starting to work in 30-minute blocks,” Floery says. Research indicates that testosterone and cortisol rise at the same rate in the first 30 minutes of exercise; past this, testosterone drops off and cortisol continues to rise, making one feel stressed. I have experienced that unpleasant cortisol creep, though I admit to being skeptical about the promise of a full-body workout in 30 minutes. Feel free to arrive as I did to use your First Class Free Pass, but trust me: you’ll leave a BELIEVER.

When you go, you’ll be stationed adjacent to the source, which for me was Floery. From this vantage, I saw all moves and heard all cues over the fun music. To the beat, the full class of 14 flowed our resistance-band-lashed arms and legs in synchronistic beauty. Think: Vitruvian man as marionette, but you are the puppeteer! Some participants used

only the red band or just one overhead tube for less resistance; some sought more and drew their ankle straps closer to their cores. Anyone who has danced, done aerobics, Pilates, or yoga might say the moves are reminiscent, though it’s a whole new challenging ballgame with the band tension, and the instructors design the flows to work your muscles in contrasting directions—bicep, then tricep, smaller muscles and ligaments, then bigger muscles. Early in the class, I pushed past the tension point and lost my balance. Floery says that happens to nearly everyone early on.

“You think the bands are supporting you,” she explains, “but they’re not. Your body should be supporting you. We are programmed, when we’re holding on to something to rely on it entirely as if that’s what should hold you up, but it’s the opposite. You have to stabilize through your core.”

Floery will explain what works and what doesn’t to clients, but she really wants them to learn on their own, because then it’s intuitive and enduring. “I can see people listening to the wisdom of their bodies as they progress and work harder.” She discourages instructors from getting off their mats to correct clients. “I may deliver a general cue, but



Deborah Allen





I don't want to call out any one person, unless they are doing something that could hurt them." Floery and staff pay close attention to all the needs of all clients, be they modifications due to chronic conditions, extreme athleticism or anything in between. They want people to feel safe, have fun, work hard and come back. And come back they do.

Erin Marynak, 31, says, "I had a knee injury and was looking for a high-intensity workout without high-impact movements. You get that surrounded by kind and encouraging people. I've tried numerous gyms, but at Da Vinci, I noticed results the first week. I'm stronger, but leaner. I'm addicted!"

Barbara Bintree, filmmaker, says, "My involvement in Da Vinci has changed my life in some ways. The short intense workouts fit my schedule and the studio has a great aesthetic. I feel a steady change in my strength and coordination. I don't feel pain in my joints like I sometimes do when lifting weights. The workout is ever-changing."

Marvin Garden, 58, says: "I've lost inches and improved my whole body and core strength while reducing pain from previous injuries. Floery, thank you for choosing Santa Fe."

Someone else might say, "You're welcome, Santa Fe. Now, I can coast." Not Floery. She and Karen want to offer a class for wheelchair-bound individuals, as well as pre- and post-natal classes. They want to partner with the YMCA and retirement communities. "We want everyone to be able to try Da Vinci," says Karen. And with Lily helping to drive the licensed model, this is definitely happening—beyond North America, one can strengthen their core in Asia and Europe. "I hope this helps the world," says Floery. "We are in a serious crisis, where people feel defeated by their bodies. I hope everyone can feel healthier."

When you go for your first class and eventually your 25th, you'll become friends with everyone, including the studio mascot—no, not Vitruvian man, but Sherman, a Basenji-Chihuahua mix, with Chinese zodiac traits you can't help but love. He's loyal, honest, reliable and social. Find him on a BodyBoard, paying homage to Da Vinci, along with everyone else.



For information on location, classes and rates at Da Vinci Body Studio go to davincibodystudiosf.com.

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