



BY JACK DARNTON

**Avocation:** What you do in addition to your regular work, usually for pleasure, perhaps a hobby.  
**Vocation:** Any trade, profession or occupation.

“May your avocation be your vocation,” a graduation speaker once told a bright-eyed bunch of high school seniors ready to take on the world. Can it be? Indeed.

When those definitions blur, when your avocation seems like your vocation, life can be rich indeed. When you're doing what you want to do, when work is a joy and not a chore, then new goals, dreams and accomplishments can surely follow.

We're waxing on here, inspired in great measure by many of the practitioners in the health care industry and related fields we'll introduce you to (or reacquaint you with) in this month's issue. It's filled with people with passion and purpose who work to improve all our lives – and build rich lives for themselves at the same time.

Elisabeth Bart is the owner of Soothing Waters on Samish Island and a certified watsu practitioner. She works with people in a pool at her home, guiding them through a series of holds, bends, stretches and slow spins as they're suspended in warm water.

“It's very dance-like and I love the movement of it,” she told reporter Michael Karkabé-Olson. “I enjoy helping people achieve well-being, physically, emotionally and spiritually. The first word I hear from them after it's over is ‘wow.’”

Elisabeth has been a water lover her whole life. She owned and operated her own water fitness business. She also taught special education and worked at Riverside Health Club as its director of water exercise. Now, in addition to watsu, she also offers aqua baby classes, beginning swim lessons and water fitness classes.

“It's something I love to do,” she said.

Take this job and embrace it. Do you love what you do? Not every minute or every day. Not every budget report and employee spat. But the essence of the job and its purpose.

“I picked this business for the lifestyle rather than to make money. I have to make

a living, but I want to make it doing something I enjoy and something I believe in, and this store gives me that chance.”

Those words come from Wendy Scott, owner of Skagit Running Co. in downtown Mount Vernon.

Wendy sells shoes, but she sells a lifestyle as well. Her payoff comes in getting customers out onto the track and trail and developing the running habit.

If you think that kind of exercise is for other people with more time, don't try to sell Wendy on the idea. Her zeal for running may be boundless.

“You take the time to prepare a healthy meal, shouldn't you give yourself as much time doing something that will last a lifetime?” she asks.

Reesa Compton started asking a lot of hard questions after her daughter was killed in a head-on car accident.

“I really needed to find myself after Katie died in the accident. I had been a mom and homemaker for all of my married life (27 years), and I just needed a change” she said. She wanted to get out of the house and throw herself into a challenge – and somehow put the nutrition and home economics degrees she had earned at college to good use.

The end result was a new business: Ladies Fit Express in Mount Vernon.

“I enjoy helping women improve themselves, both physically and mentally,” Reesa said. “If you feel better about yourself it carries over into other areas of your life — with your family, with your co-workers, your community. We work to instill a positive attitude.”

How's your attitude? We can all get some inspiration from those whose vocation, and seemingly their avocations, is helping others live healthier lives.

Jack Darnton is the editor of the Business Pulse as well as the publisher of the Anacortes American.



# *A floating massage*



Laura Reid of Samish Island receives a watsu from Elisabeth Bart, owner of Soothing Waters.

photo by Michael Karkabé-Olson

## *Samish Island business offers watsu treatments*

**BY MICHAEL KARKABÉ-OLSON**  
STAFF WRITER

SAMISH ISLAND — Elisabeth Bart cradles watsu-recipient Laura Reid like a baby.

Gracefully and deftly, she guides the woman through a series of holds, bends, stretches and slow spins. Suspended in warm water, eyes closed, Reid responds by smiling blissfully, letting go of her daily tensions and anxieties.

It's all part of the watsu experience, Bart said later as she walked through her spa-like, resort-like home on Samish Island. The pool in which she conducts her watsu sessions is located behind the

house, surrounded by trees and chirping birds.

"In water, the body can become free in ways that are not possible on land," she said. "The spine is not compressed as it would be on a table. On land, we tend to carry certain holding patterns. Warm water relaxes the muscles, opens the joints and improves the circulation."

Watsu is based upon the Oriental practice of shiatsu, the Asian method of bodywork that aims to release blocked energy to relieve pain and reduce tension. The word itself is derived from the words "water" and "shiatsu."

The new discipline got its start in California during the 1980s when

Harold Dull, head of the School of Shiatsu and Massage at Harbin Hot Springs, began applying shiatsu stretches in warm water. The practice has evolved to include a combination of shiatsu, yoga, massage and — well — watsu techniques.

It has become popular enough that it has subsequently spread to Europe, Japan and the Pacific Northwest, Bart said.

Bart said she first learned of watsu five years ago while giving a speech about other water-related activities at a conference in Fort Lauderdale. Someone in the audience approached her afterward and told her about it. She then learned about the Whitstone Retreat Center in Sedro-Woolley, a watsu instructional training facility near her home, where she eventually received

*"I have muscle tightness in my neck and this really helps. I like the weightlessness, the loosened muscles and feeling graceful. It's beautiful and peaceful. When I was pregnant, it also helped relieve much of the pain and pressure."*



watsu certification.

"It was really calling to me," she said. "People from all over the country go there to study."

She is now the owner of Soothing Waters on Samish Island. Bart started up the business in 1999. In addition to watsu, her business also offers aqua baby classes, beginning swim lessons and water fitness classes.

The benefits of watsu, Bart said, include diminished muscular tension, increased range of motion, reduction of pain, improved posture, fuller respiration and reduced stress and anxiety. It can also be helpful at easing symptoms for some medical problems, such as arthritic conditions, pregnancy, chronic and acute pain, neuromuscular disorders, migraines, hyper-tension, depression and mobility impairment.

"It's very dance-like and I love the movement of it," she added. "I enjoy helping people achieve well-being, physically, emotionally and spiritually. The first word I hear from them after it's over is 'wow.'"

Previous to becoming the owner of Soothing Waters, Bart owned and operated her own water fitness business. She also taught special education and worked at Riverside Health Club as its director of water exercise.

"I've been a water lover my whole life," she said.

To become a certified watsu practitioner, she initially underwent 150 hours of training. She has since expanded her

watsu education to include a total of 250 hours worth of training.

"It's something I love to do," she added.

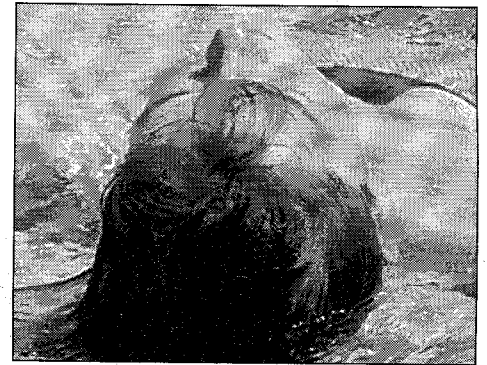
Reid describes the treatments as magical, Bart's touch as soothing. She has undergone five watsu sessions so far. A one-hour session costs \$70.

"I would have one every single week if I could afford it," Reid said. "I have muscle tightness in my neck and this really helps. I like the weightlessness, the loosened muscles and feeling graceful. It's beautiful and peaceful. When I was pregnant, it also helped relieve much of the pain and pressure."

Another advocate of watsu is Karn Kenaston of Samish Island, who has had one session so far. She decided to try it recently because she had previously received massage, acupuncture and chiropractor treatments. It sounded like it was along those lines, except in water, she said, working with pressure points and having her spiritual chi soothed.

"It was wonderful," Kenaston said. "Being in the water is what makes it unique. I've never experienced anything like it before. I achieved a meditative state. It was very womb-like. After a while you don't feel like you're in water at all. For hours afterward I felt incredible. I want to do it again."

For more information about Soothing Waters or watsu, call 360-766-8403 or visit its Web site at [www.soothing-waters.net](http://www.soothing-waters.net)



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