

WSU exercise lab dedicated to Dr. Randy Miller

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To say Randy Miller came in on the ground floor of the wellness movement in Winona would be a colossal understatement. There really was no floor to speak of, no movement, just a little room with an old treadmill in it and some dusty equipment that no one was even sure how to use.

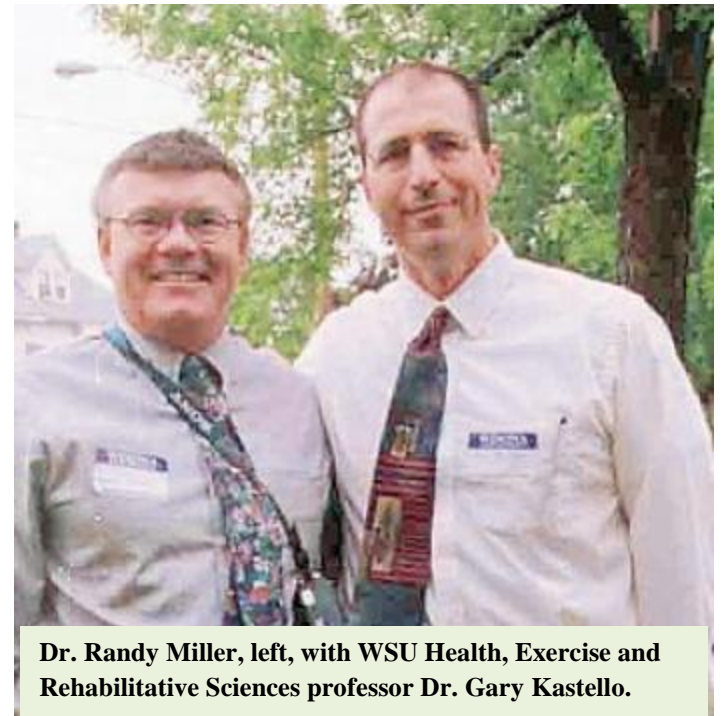
But about the time a young Miller was starting his teaching career at Winona State University in 1974 there was a national conversation happening over a book called *Aerobics* by Kenneth Cooper, and Miller and Andy Blomsness got to talking. Blomsness was the director at the YMCA and looking for a partnership that could help members better monitor their physical health.

Cooper's book outlined for the first time levels of fitness according to heart performance and other criteria, and the concept, in a society where no one really exercised much, was huge. "When I came to Winona there were only a couple of people who even jogged," he said. "Back then everybody sat around and smoked cigarettes and drank beer." The concept that working the heart and body could improve health was relatively novel, but it made sense to Miller and he was in.

As a health sciences and physical education instructor, all Miller had at his disposal was an ancient treadmill and a physiograph he found tucked away and long forgotten, but it was enough to get started with. The men got Syd Hughes, a local physician, to monitor their test subjects, and with the primitive setup they started doing fitness evaluations.

Based on fitness results, the team sent a several people to get bypass surgeries, and the fitness evaluations were gaining in popularity for their ability to tell subjects how well their bodies were responding to a fitness plan. But when Miller's own father suffered a heart attack, his focus changed from helping those who were fit to helping those who needed to become so. Cardiac rehabilitation didn't

really exist in those days, as most doctors had not subscribed to the notion that exercise could strengthen the heart and they didn't want to kill their patients by having them try. But Miller took some postdoctoral courses in the emerging field of cardiac rehabilitation and created a plan at WSU. To implement the cardiac rehabilitation program, Miller needed a \$12,000 EKG machine, and he also needed some referrals of heart patients willing to



Dr. Randy Miller, left, with WSU Health, Exercise and Rehabilitative Sciences professor Dr. Gary Castello.

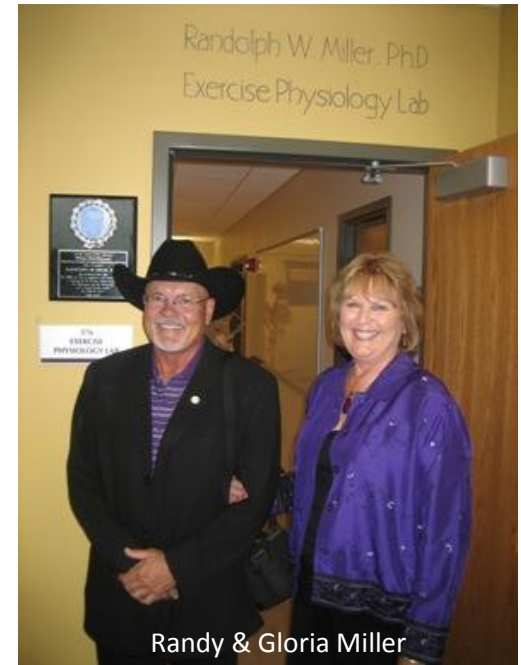
subscribe to the idea. The money, it turns out, was easier to find than the referrals after local businessman Tom Henderson, of Lake Center Switch, bought the equipment for the cause. Slowly patients trickled in, and students joining the new fitness philosophy started showing up to volunteer to work with Miller's program. It would not be long before Miller convinced the powers that be that wellness was a rapidly growing arena that deserved curricular credit as well as a little more funding. Piece by piece he and his staff built the first fitness lab, and credit by credit the university built curriculum that today has split off into several separate majors that are putting Winona State students on the health care map.

The biggest breakthrough for the fitness lab came about ten years after Miller started when former Merchants Bank president Pete Roehl helped him bankroll an \$85,000 cardiopulmonary unit, one of only two in the state. The other was at the Mayo Clinic, and WSU health sciences students became big shots who walked seamlessly into internships and jobs at Mayo thanks to their training here. People came to the understanding that heart health had a direct relationship to physical activity, and support came in waves for Miller and his staff. "We started to get more money from the community because they saw what the cardiac lab did for patients," he said.

About ten years down the road, one of the young PhDs in the lab, a woman named Dawn Anderson, went after and received a National Science Foundation grant, a sum big enough to completely renovate and upgrade the fitness lab. It was another turning point for the facility that over the years blossomed from a tiny room with an old treadmill to three separate state of the art labs on the third floor of Maxwell Hall. There, kinesiology, exercise physiology and chemistry are studied, and students from departments like nursing, psychology, pharmacology and physical education examine wellness through myriad lenses. To Miller, the growth is pretty amazing. "You just can't imagine the difference," he said. Miller retired in 2006 after 32 years at the university. On Friday WSU will dedicate the Randolph Miller Exercise Physiology Lab to him as part of the week's homecoming activities.

Miller is bashful about the dedication, giving over credit to his early collaborators and staff through the years. "I think it's a great honor," he said, "but I think the faculty brought it into fruition, not just me. That's what happens when you hire good people." The open house dedication for Miller will be Friday afternoon from 2 to 4 p.m. in 376 Maxwell Hall. Friends, students and colleagues are invited to attend. Dr. Miller and his wife, Gloria, retired Alumni Director, will be the Grand Marshals of the WSU homecoming parade Saturday.

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