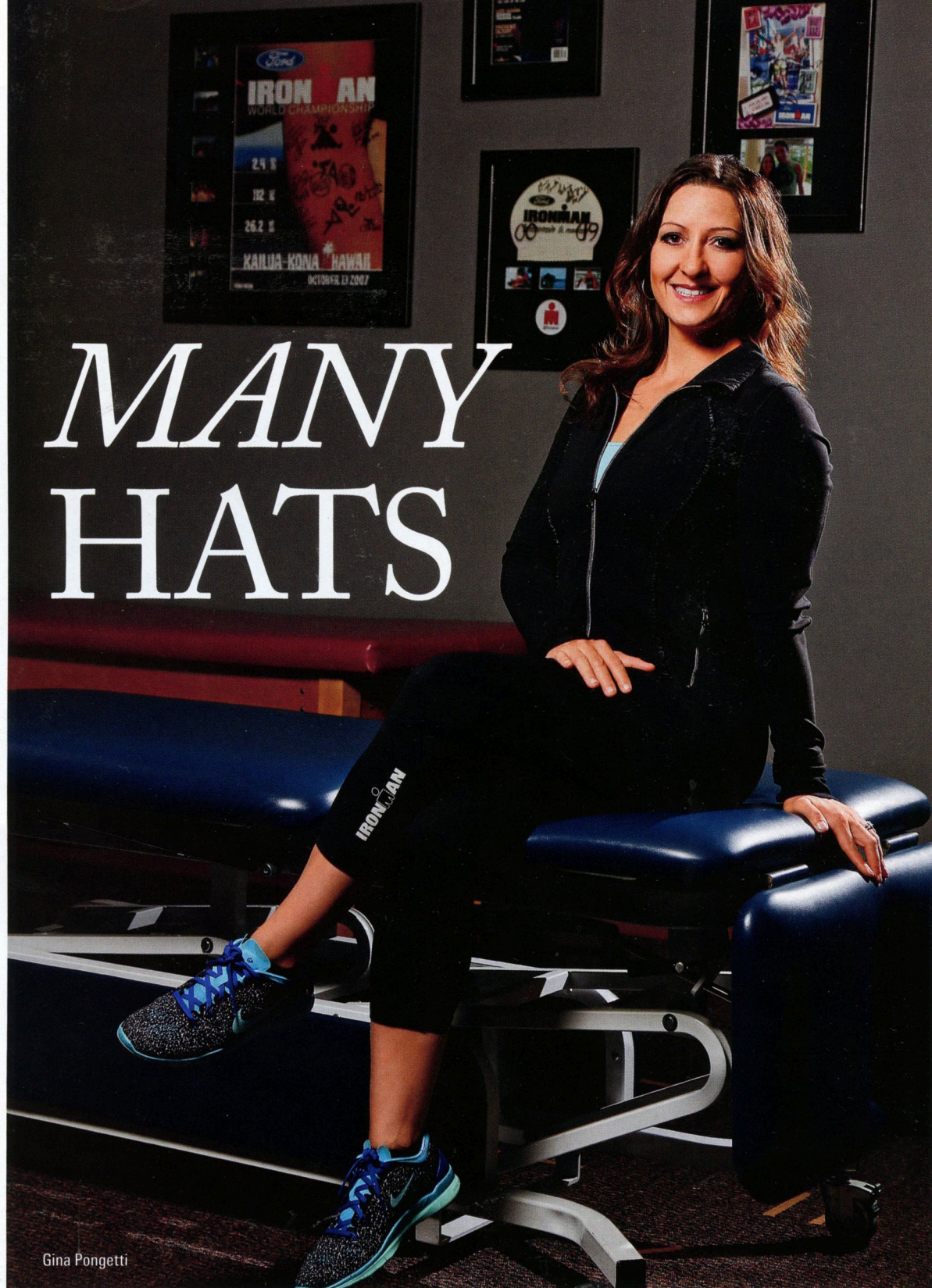


MANY HATS



Gina Pongetti

Achieve Orthopedic Rehabilitation Institute Sports Medicine's Gina Pongetti believes it takes a team to rehab injuries and ensure quicker recoveries for athletes—no matter what the sport.

WORDS BY **ROSIE CONWAY** | PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JOEL LERNER**

Author Malcolm Gladwell believes that there are many variables involved in one's personal success. He says, "What we do as a community, as a society, for each other, matters as much as what we do for ourselves." Words could not ring truer for avid Gladwell fan Gina Pongetti, physical therapist and partner of Achieve Orthopedic Rehabilitation Institute Sports Medicine. In fact, one could argue that Pongetti has taken the Gladwell approach to success to heart and has created one of the most personal, concierge-type sports rehabilitation practices today.

In May 2012, Pongetti found herself at a career crossroad both metaphorically and physically. While taking her son on a walk, Pongetti happened to be passing Achieve Orthopedic Rehabilitation Institute. "I was a clinical partner at Accelerated at the time and I noticed this space on a walk one day," explains Pongetti.

Pongetti admired the respected original owners of Achieve, Bob Johnson and Ashraf Abdelhamid, and reached out to them to see if she could join their company and start the Sports Medicine side of their practice. "Bob and Ashraf teach everywhere," explains Pongetti. "So anyone who is anyone in the PT world within manual therapy has been to one of their courses." Prior to Pongetti's partnership, Achieve did not cater to the sports medicine population, so it was never viewed as a local competitor while she was at previous positions.

Pongetti is well educated in the areas of physical therapy having earned her Masters Degree in Physical Therapy from Marquette University and a Masters Degree in Health Communication from Michigan State. She was the assistant coach for the Michigan State gymnastics team for a year and considered pursuing a career in coaching rather than physical therapy. "I had studied six out of the seven years in PT but I took a year off to coach because the opportunity was there," explains Pongetti, a 14-year competitive former gymnast herself. "It was a great experience and there are only a handful of us that are coaches, former gymnasts, and medically trained."

After taking a position at Achieve and opening the sports medicine division, Pongetti's schedule was full on her first day of work. She started out with two employees and now has blossomed to 14, celebrating their third anniversary in May. "Because I was not growing too fast in quantity and not concerned with productivity and numbers," explains Pongetti, "I was able to provide my PTs with a phenomenally supportive and positive atmosphere to work in."

Pongetti describes her environment very much as a concierge service atmosphere. Achieve works with a vast array of clients—everyone from adolescent orthopedics to high endurance athletes. Pongetti provides PT services for many professional dancers and Broadway

touring companies, and travels throughout the US to treat national-level gymnasts. Achieve treats pro athletes from every organization, from the NFL to World and Olympic champions. "We treat about 30-40 percent endurance sports, 30-40 percent performing arts, and 20 percent active adults," says Pongetti. "We have a niche in gymnastics and dance medicine that is unmatched, even nationally. Being an Ironman Triathlete and having staff who are elite triathletes helps us to be very much enveloped in the endurance community in the western suburbs."

But if you're not an athlete and you need therapy, you, too, are welcome at the clinic. But know that the upbeat vibes and buzzing atmosphere is all part of the process. "We are not about laying clients down with steam and ice in a corner. You are going to work," says Pongetti.

Everything Pongetti treats is orthopedic—sprains, tears, spine pain, post-surgical knees, shoulder pain, Achilles, and more. "We treat every body part including wrist and hand," she says. "It's all sports and lifestyle injuries."

Because Achieve is a manual therapy based practice, for over half the time at the clinic you are being touched. Achieve does work in dry needling, which is thin needles used to release trigger points in the muscles, Active Release Techniques (A.R.T), Graston Techniques, joint mobilization, scar tissue release, and more. The certifications for such techniques are very expensive and very prestigious, but in the long run, it's worth it to Pongetti. "What makes a patient better is making sure that their tissue and their joints are set for success," explains Pongetti. "With only doing exercise-based therapy, or traditional boxed home programs, you're missing the biomechanics alignment component of rehabilitation and fixing why they got here in the first place."

Pongetti works directly with the patient, the parents, and the community to ensure the highest degree of success at rehabilitating one's injury. Sometimes parents insist on sending their child to Pongetti up to three times a week, knowing their child will not complete necessary work at home, or they will take Pongetti's information and work directly with their child themselves. Either way, it's an all-encompassing plan. "We play the family game very well," explains Pongetti.

In effect, Pongetti is creating a well-rounded, full-service patient plan. Pongetti and her elite-level staff take care of their clients from start to finish no matter what the needs. "Our web of outreach and connections in the community to quality professionals help create a team—physician, PT, athletic trainer, coach, sports psychologist, chiropractor, massage, and acupuncture," says Pongetti. "We are successful because we don't do it alone."

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