

# HEALTHWISE

## Ottawa



**Dave McMahon  
& Lise Meloche**

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SISTERS**

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STOVE PROJECT**

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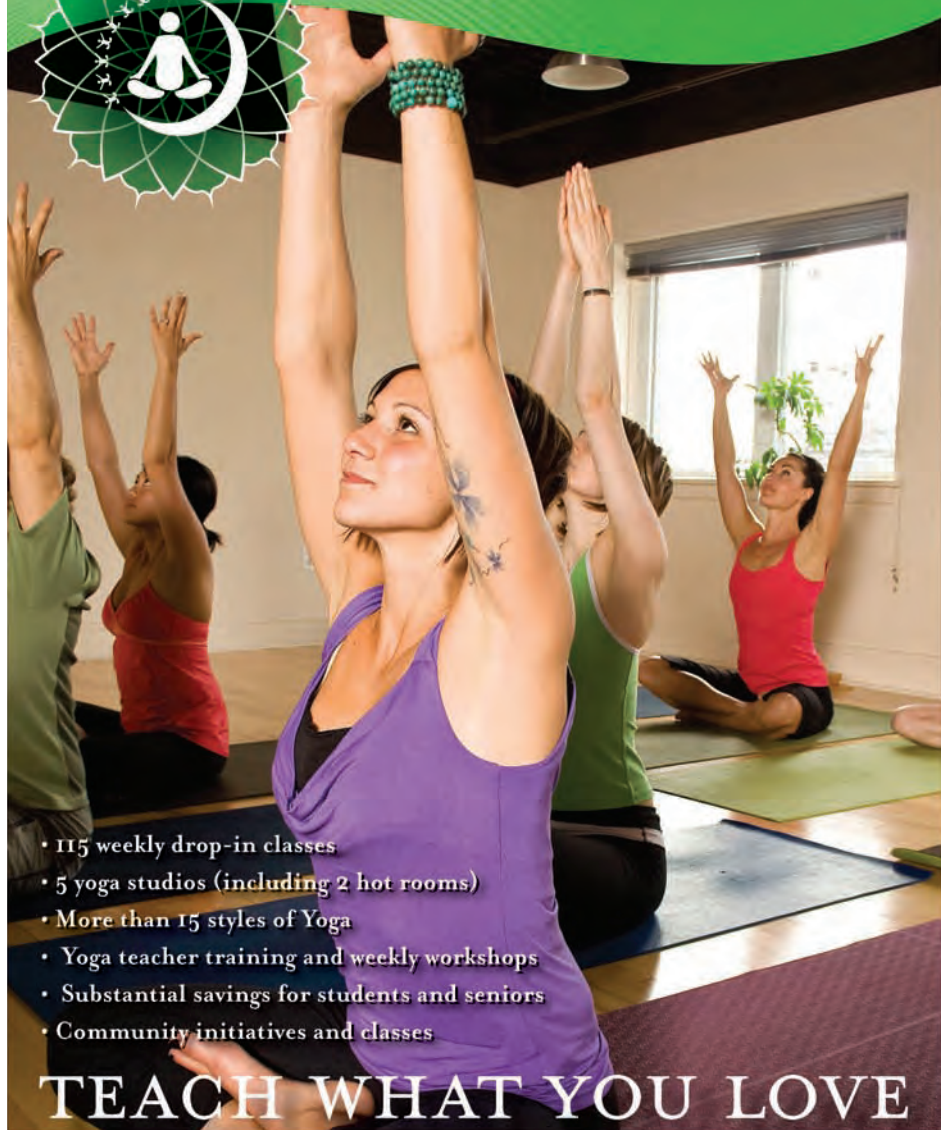
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WINTER 2010/2011

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## EDITOR'S CORNER

One of the benefits of putting out an issue of *Healthwise Ottawa* is the amazing stories Judy (our publisher) and I get to put into print. All of our issues have spotlighted ordinary people with extraordinary stories, and this issue is no different.

From Dr. Aubrey Goldstein, liver transplant recipient and competitive athlete, to Tom Clarke, champion of environmentally sensitive cooking systems in Guatemala, you'll find stories in this issue that will warm the cockles of your heart.

But don't just sit this winter out. Even if you shun the cold, you can still stay active throughout the long winter months, indoors. Organize a sports team or join one already in existence by checking out the item on the Ottawa Sport & Social Club. Or stay hot by taking up burlesque dancing. If you want a boot-camp style challenge, all you type A's can link up with the Natural Fitness Lab. And if any of you suffer from sometimes debilitating ailments like asthma, migraines, and arthritis (just to name a few), check in with MediClim® before venturing out for your day's activity.

Just keep safe this winter, and we'll be back with you in the spring to give you more uplifting stories from the inspiring members of our Ottawa community.

Kinneret Globerman



COVER PHOTO  
Howard Sandler  
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Dynamic duo Dave McMahon  
and Lise Meloche from the  
Natural Fitness Lab.  
*See page 32 for the story.*



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Six Weeks of Healthy Eating! Page 50

# Dave and Lise:

## World-Class Ski Experts with a Grassroots Focus

By Dan Plouffe

How's this for a nice activity on a nippy day: a little trip through knee-deep, close-to-freezing water in your running shoes and shorts?

As Dave McMahon cuts off course and dashes across the fast-moving river, his group of Gatineau Park trail runners share the same initial reaction: Is this guy totally nuts? But eventually most shake their heads and follow their leader, emerging on the other side of the bank with smiles on their faces (and maybe also a mild case of hypothermia).

"I try to keep things a little unpredictable," McMahon grins, as he enjoys a post-workout coffee. "It's all about pushing limits. We'll put them in the mud pits and the rivers — really out of their comfort zone — and then, when they do that, they realize that's what they used to do as a kid, and they just gobble it up."

McMahon and his wife, Lise Meloche, are the coaches for the Natural Fitness Lab group that gets together to practice a pair of intertwined sports: trail running in summer and cross-country skiing in winter. With a total mailing list of about 500 people, anywhere from 30 to 80 athletes (with varied abilities and with an average age in the mid-30s) come out for the sessions that take place several times a week.

McMahon and Meloche take part in all kinds of other "clean oxygen-fed sport" activities, the term they've patented to

encompass outdoor pursuits such as mountain biking, rowing, adventure racing, and, of course, Nordic skiing.

"Just name the sport," McMahon says, explaining that participants carry across-the-map interests from whitewater rafting to wrestling. "If you want to take up something, there's probably an expert in the group."

On top of the social network that comes with training together, the crew acts almost as a self-help group, as many of the participants are doctors, massage therapists, and other health care professionals.

There likely isn't anyone with greater expertise, however, than

the Natural Fitness Lab pair who met and married when they were members of the Canadian biathlon team in the 1980s. Meloche, a four-time World Cup gold medalist and two-time Olympian, and fellow biathlon national champ McMahon literally wrote the handbook on how to Nordic ski for Cross Country Canada, a national skiing community. They've worked with numerous world-class athletes, but what they really enjoy is helping out less experienced newcomers with the group they've formed in the Gatineaus.

"With the elite athletes, you only see a slight progression. It's a much different



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world,” Meloche notes, explaining that beginners tend to enjoy a much more rapid progression. “There’s such a huge learning curve, and they’re so proud of what they’ve done once they learn. It’s so good to see. It’s really inspiring for us.”

McMahon and Meloche were novices themselves when they began what has become another major part of their venture, “clean oxygen-fed sport cinematography,” which they display on their company website [xczone.com](http://xczone.com). They began by making “horrible sports videos that only we could watch.” But eventually they learned the craft, as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and other broadcasters, finding it tough to set up cameras to follow racers the entire way along courses, asked for their help.

They’ve produced over a dozen full-length DVDs and there’s now a sophisticated production studio at McMahon and Meloche’s Chelsea home. Featuring a wide range of sports in picturesque settings from across the globe, many of the videos include top international athletes demonstrating what their sports are all about from a point-of-view perspective.

“We’d go out in the woods and we’d do these crazy things, and then we’d come back and I could tell my mom about it, but she’d have no concept of what we actually did,” McMahon recalls. “Now we could say, ‘See, this is what we did.’”

McMahon and Meloche also create promotional videos for amateur athletes who can’t afford to make their own commercials to help recruit sponsors. They won’t allow students to pay to take part in any of their programs, either.

“We’ve been there and we know how focused they can be and how important it is for them to achieve their goals,” explains Meloche, a teacher and cross-country team coach at John McCrae Secondary School in Barrhaven. “They need all the help they can get.”

McMahon and Meloche’s original instructional DVDs on how to cross-country ski serve as a useful tool to help participants in their group learn and improve their technique — a good supplement to in-person lessons, McMahon notes.

“I can sit here and tell you how to run, but it’s much better if we run together and I can explain as we do it what’s happening,” adds McMahon, the Bell Canada complex security programs specialist who doesn’t

like coaching from the sidelines. “Or as we’re skiing together, we can talk about technique and about a training program or about psychology and apply it as we go along.”

The Natural Fitness Lab program, as a whole, has proven to be popular with the local active community, including one participant who started trail running with the group and then jumped on the Nordic skiing bandwagon for the first time last winter.

“It’s been fabulous,” says a participant, who’s also learning the concept of ChiRunning [see *Healthwise Ottawa’s* Fall 2010 issue] to reduce stress and running injuries from Eric Collard and Mike Stashin — another pair who often joins in for the trail workouts. “Dave and Lise have been fantastic, helping out to give you a technique to work on so that

when you are out there skate-skiing, you’re able to do it the best, easiest way possible.”

Unless, of course, McMahon decides to pull one of his devious detours. The 46-year-old makes sure participants are always on their toes and pushing their limits, whether it’s doing a trail run on a rainy night with headlamps, climbing an enormous hill on skis, or darting through a frigid river.

“I want to get as many people as we can to a level of fitness and health and skill so that we can all play together,” McMahon smiles, emphasizing a desire for everyone in the Natural Fitness Lab to develop a lifelong love of sport. “When it’s miserable out, getting together and doing something that’s helping each other with our goals for fitness and health, that’s what it’s all about.” **HWO**



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