

https://oanow.com/news/local/from-a-birmingham-garage-to-eight-states-former-auburn-cheerleader-opens-iron-tribe-fitness-gym/article_e058f3d0-a95a-11ed-9c74-8776fcd50f35.html

TOP STORY

From a Birmingham garage to eight states: Former Auburn cheerleader opens Iron Tribe Fitness gym in Auburn

LAUREN JOHNSON

Feb 12, 2023



Forrest Walden, former Auburn University cheerleader, continues to expand his Birmingham-based franchise, Iron Tribe Fitness, to Auburn, Ala., on June 12.

Bob Farley / f8photo

LAUREN JOHNSON

Former Auburn University cheerleader, Forrest Walden, is expanding his Iron Tribe Fitness franchise and opening up a gym location in Auburn.

The new fitness gym is set to open on June 1 in the new center The Village at Samford Trace on East Samford Avenue, which is near the Bow and Arrow restaurant, Samford Glenn Apartments and Shelley Orthodontics.

Walden, 46, graduated from Auburn University in 1998 with a degree in exercise science. He found his passion for helping others reach their fitness goals during his time at Auburn on the university's cheerleading team.

Walden said his goal was always to play football, but since that didn't work out, he said the next best thing was cheerleading. He received a scholarship to Auburn and got to travel for football games.

"When I made the cheerleading team, I was the smallest guy and the weakest guy, and I figured this has got to change," Walden said. "So, I spent the entire summer of my freshman year working out, taking supplements, writing down everything I ate, and I came back to campus for two-a-day practices in August 30 pounds heavier."

People are also reading...

- 1 18-wheeler turned over in wreck near Interstate 85**
- 2 Heavy rain floods First Avenue in Opelika again, leaving business owners frustrated**
- 3 An 'angel' and a 'gift,' Auburn's Shana Askew Daniels dies at 44**
- 4 HITTER OF THE YEAR: Gerritt Griggs an experienced young threat for Central-Phenix City**

Walden said gaining the 30 pounds of muscle gave him confidence and changed his life. Not only did it give him the strength he needed to lift his partner above his head, but it directed him onto the path of personal training.

In the weight room, others started asking him for advice on how to get in shape and build certain muscles. Walden then decided to pursue a degree in exercise science and a career in personal training.

Walden also ended up meeting his future wife on the cheer team, Mendy Brannum, an Auburn cheerleader who graduated in 1999 with a degree in nursing. Mendy is the niece of Auburn's first Heisman Trophy winner, Pat Sullivan.

When Walden was a senior and Mendy was a junior, they were both co-heads of the cheer team, which meant they led the squad. Walden said that's when "sparks started flying."

After graduating, Walden returned to his hometown and began working as a personal trainer in gyms, studios or at people's homes while his wife worked at UAB.

"We weren't seeing each other very much because as a trainer I was working early mornings and late afternoon evenings, working around everybody else's work schedule," Walden said. "I figured out I'm just trading time for money, and if I ever want to build something that's got some scale to it, I'm gonna have to open my own business."

So, in 2001, he opened his first Fitness Together franchise in Birmingham, which grew into six area locations. He purchased the Fitness Together master franchise rights to three states and grew his business to 55 locations in three years.

Walden said he saw the industry was shifting from one-on-one training to group-training, and he wanted to pivot in that direction.

As a cheerleader at Auburn, Walden said they trained together as a squad, but most of the time they worked out on their own. He said there are benefits to working with a trainer one-on-one, but there's something special about the camaraderie and competitiveness of a group setting.

"I found people actually would work harder with the pressure of the group," he said. "There's just this competitive aspect of it that's really hard to manufacture in a one-on-one environment."

Walden sold his studios and master franchise territories back to Fitness Together and started over in his garage with his own team-based, group workout concept.

“I just converted my garage into a gym and invited a bunch of my friends,” he said.

During this time, he said his friends were getting results and his neighbors, some of whom didn't have any exercise history or background, were having fun and getting into it.

“I was like, man, what would it take to recreate this environment that's happening in my hot, unairconditioned garage, and that led to that first location right there in my hometown,” Walden said.

In 2010, the first Iron Tribe Fitness gym opened in Homewood, Ala. Now his franchise has grown to include 30 gyms in eight states with four more locations in development, including the one in Auburn.

Iron Tribe Fitness has been recognized by “Men's Journal” as one of the top five workouts in the nation, and Walden received the Auburn University Entrepreneur of the Year award in 2015.

Walden said he's excited to finally have a gym open in Auburn in June. Franchisees Derek and Ashley Gann will be moving from Birmingham to run the Auburn location.

The Gann couple co-owns 101 Mobility, based in Birmingham, and Ashley serves as Chief Meteorologist at CBS 42 in Birmingham. She was also recently named one of the Top 20 Alumni under 40 by the Auburn Alumni Association, according to a release.

Iron Tribe Fitness is also in the process of opening gyms in Tampa, Fla., Columbia, S.C. and two in Nashville, Tenn.



MD: If You Have Dark Spots, Do This Immediately (It's Genius!)



3 Toxic Foods for Dogs: The One Meat You Should Never Feed Your Dog



P90X Expert Says: Want To Feel Stronger at 60 Than at 30? Do This One Thing



High Blood Sugar? Try This Tonight



Colorado Drivers With No DUIs Getting a Pay Day On Wednesday



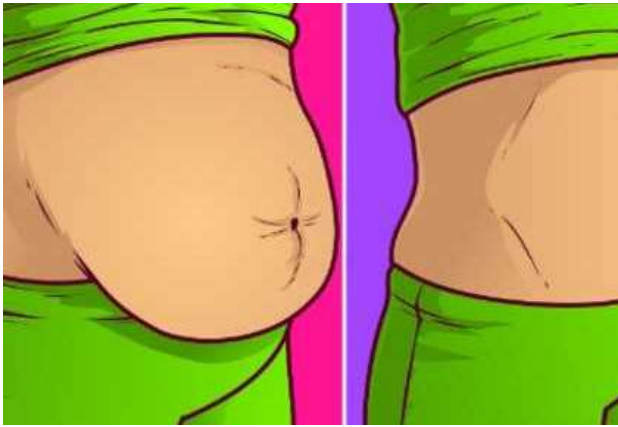
7 Family Doctors In Littleton With Rave Reviews



Unveiling the New Senior Apartments In Littleton - See the Prices Here



Top Heart Surgeon: This Simple Trick Helps Empty Your Bowels Every Morning



Too Much Belly Fat? Top Cardiologists Share A Surprising Tip For Bedtime