



## Outside the Box

### Fiscal Fitness: Mark Harrington

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The night before he opens up a new health club, Mark Harrington goes into the quiet gym and exercises alone. It is the only time he will ever be allowed to use the facility. Harrington is the president of Healthworks Fitness Centers for Women Inc., a chain of five women-only health clubs in the Boston area.

Harrington and his wife, Patty, started the gym in 1977. The upscale clubs not only provide treadmills, weights and a multitude of exotic fitness classes, they also offer a host of spa-like services from steam rooms to massages. More than 20,000 women are members of Healthworks gyms. The company also runs a free gym for about 600 homeless and low-income women in Roxbury and Dorchester through its Healthworks Foundation. Harrington recently sat down with reporter Jackie Noblett to talk physical and financial fitness.

*Is it tough to develop business strategy when you have to rely on other people to determine its success?*

My friends always say, "I can't believe you run a club that you can't even go in." One of the reasons I think we have been successful is that I've been able to hire great people who can handle the facilities' day-to-day operations. As we've found over the years, fitness is a lifestyle when you live in the city.

*Do you think women are taking better care or worse care of themselves in this economy?*

For our paying customers, there is much more interest in (health and fitness) now. Their lives are becoming more and more stressful and they feel this is a more important part of their lives. But in the inner city, it is much more of a problem.

*Is that why you decided to open a nonprofit gym?*

Yes. In the inner city there are serious problems with obesity, diabetes and heart disease. ... If businesses would just concentrate on what they do best, they would be successful in their philanthropy. For us, that's running health and fitness centers.

*Favorite part of your job?*

It's interacting with the team that we have. It's a small business, but we cover every part of a small business. I also really enjoy the site planning, the design and construction of new gyms we open.

*Most difficult business decision you've made?*

A lot of the decisions we've made on whether we should grow faster or build on opportunities we have in our facilities. To a degree, the choice has been to make our clubs better.

*Do you have a role model?*

My mother, 91 years old.

*Since you can't work out in the Healthworks gym, what do you like to do to stay fit?*

I love to go running on the Esplanade. I enjoy most outdoor activities: skiing, boating, golfing.

*Motto?*

Carpe diem (seize the day).