



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK SAVOLIN



top: Ann (right) shares a moment with daughter Meredith, who serves as vice president of Nature's Pantry and Well by Nature. **above:** The center offers several varieties of massage. Most of the center's practitioners possess years of training and experience.

A Natural Approach to Health

From a health food store to a holistic health center, entrepreneur Ann Yates brings wellness alternatives to the Knoxville community.

When Ann Yates turned 50, she embarked on a three-month trip around the world. While traveling through London; Paris; Zurich; Bangkok, Thailand; Singapore; and Bali, she clambered on towering elephants, rafted down white-water rivers, and tromped through teeming jungles. At every exotic locale, the Knoxville woman also immersed herself in the world's healing arts.

The journey answered her question about how best to contribute to society during the second half of her life. For more than 25 years, she'd operated a natural foods grocery store. When she opened Nature's Pantry, the newly divorced entrepreneur barely made enough to support her infant son, Ben, now 26, and her 3-year-old daughter, Meredith, now 29. Ann jokes their constant supply of unsold, out-of-

date food kept the family from starving during those lean times.

"I really started studying business after I opened my own," she says. But, she adds, "I'm the consummate student." The former English teacher applied herself, picking the brains of mentors and learning the tricks of the trade. Now Nature's Pantry is a multimillion-dollar enterprise. "I do more business in a week than I did the entire first year," she says.

When Ann returned from her world travels, she began designing and building a wellness center focusing on holistic health. Well by Nature, next door to Nature's Pantry, opened less than two years ago. She believes the Knoxville community is primed for the combination of traditional and complementary health services that the center offers. ▶

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above: Debbie Ashton conducts a Watsu session with a client in the center's chlorine-free pool, heated to 96 degrees. **above, right:** A copper-and-stainless steel fountain, home to koi and other fish, provides a focal point for clients. The design features Chinese symbols representing the elements of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. **right:** Life-size copper cutouts on the entrance doors greet visitors. Inside, the center offers flowing water and calming music.

A Place of Beauty and Health

The entrance doors to the 9,000-square-foot building feature life-size copper cutouts of male and female figures. Music floats seamlessly in the air. A reception area, popping with energy, boasts bold shades ranging from burgundy to rich purple, accented with metallic gray. Metallic-painted industrial stairs and visible ductwork frame a two-story fountain made of copper, black tile, and stainless steel. Koi and other colorful fish swim to the edge, looking for handouts.

The hallway leads to space for offices, massage, yoga, nail care, acupuncture, cooking classes, lectures, and medical consultation.

The Healing Artists

In the yoga room, Ann stops to introduce Philip Clift, a specialist in ashtanga yoga and deep-tissue massage. So far, Philip and the other practitioners who lease space at the center include those trained in yoga, acupuncture, manicures

and pedicures, chiropractic, massage, fitness training, nutrition and healthy cooking, facials and makeup, Feldenkrais (gentle movement therapy), and Watsu (aquatic exercises conducted in the center's chlorine-free pool, heated to 96 degrees). A medical doctor with a private practice also consults once

a month. Plans for the center call for additional staff trained in gynecology, physical therapy, psychology, and Rolfing, a type of muscle massage.

"We're giving our clients the choices and options that are needed to really take care of their bodies," says Ann.

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"Some people want to learn healthy practices before their bodies demand it. Some people wait until something—high cholesterol, cancer, whatever—demands that they change their lifestyles."

Nurturing the Spirit

Art flows throughout the gallery-like facility, including carved sculptures from Bali and large,



about what creating Well by Nature meant to her personally. She gave a copy to her contractor and even to her bankers. "Business for me has been a spiritual path," she says, choosing her words carefully. "Taking risks and putting it all on the line

is really about trusting. I am really partners with everybody that I work with. I want them to know the heart and soul of what I'm doing." She laughs and adds, "I'm sure that I'm an interesting character to them."

NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON

get fit naturally

Well by Nature and Nature's Pantry are at 6516 Kingston Pike, Knoxville. Both are open 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Saturday and Nature's Pantry is open noon-6 p.m. Sunday. Call Well by Nature at (865) 584-3864 and Nature's Pantry at (865) 584-4714, or visit www.wellbynatureonline.com.



dramatic paintings that make pondering life's large questions seem effortless. Splashy art even hangs in the interior of the glossy, jet-black elevator. Rich green walls in what Ann calls the "wild woman bathroom" form a backdrop for dual hand-carved mirrors, with painted designs in reds, yellows, blues, orange, and the same vivid green of the walls. Black beads tastefully hang from an emergency exit door.

She believes beautiful surroundings help foster health for everyone, including employees. Ann's personal philosophy constantly influences her business dealings. At Nature's Pantry, for instance, written policy requests that employees avoid using sarcasm. "Humor, yes," says Ann, "We love to have a good time. But sarcasm is at somebody's expense."

Before construction even began, the businesswoman wrote an essay



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