

# it's all about the e's

WE'RE SALUTING AND ENCOURAGING ENTREPRENEURIAL, EMERGING AND EXPANDING TECHNOLOGY BUSINESSES IN THE LEXINGTON AREA.

When Jessamine County native Daren Carter founded Contours Express (a women only workout facility) in Nicholasville in 1998, he wasn't a stranger to the fitness business; he'd already co-owned and operated a successful co-ed gym in town with business partner Charlie Woodward. But, after reading Napoleon Hill's "Think and Grow Rich" and leaning his mother Brenda the keys to the gym for early morning or late night workouts with her female friends, the idea of creating a female friendly workout facility solidified in his mind.

Carter recalled: "My Mom used to come by and get the keys so she and her friends could work out without the men around. I wanted to do something so the ladies would be comfortable working out any time. So, I started thinking about what I'd read in Hill's book about how great ideas can be right in front of you. And—the author was right...there it was...compliments of my mom and her friends...and, that's how we got started."

Carter's entrepreneurial spirit "kicked in," and he and Woodward began developing a female-friendly facility that would create a unique environment, while helping women get the best workouts possible. To that end, the original founders worked with manufacturers to create smaller versions of the weight-bearing equipment typically used by men. The result? Special equipment which better fit the female body and still provided all the benefits from using positive and negative resistance.

The first Contours Express opened in August of 1998, and Carter knew almost immediately it would be a success because women in town who never came to his co-ed gym (people he'd known his whole life) readily signed up for the new workout facility.

"Our motto is 'It's never been so easy for a woman to be so healthy' and that's really true at Contours Express," said Carter. "We put a lot of energy into creating a place where

women would feel comfortable and supported while getting fit, and it worked."

The idea of expansion began developing in Carter's mind shortly after the ultra-successful prototype facility opened. So, for the next year Carter put plans for franchising together, and by late 1999, he had sold six Contours Express franchises; the following year, his franchise sales doubled. In 2003, Carter began franchising the company internationally. Today, there are about 400 Contours Express franchises operating in 10 countries.

When asked about the rapid growth of his company, Carter is quick to give credit to the Internet. Virtually all of his franchise marketing efforts (disseminating information and generating leads) have been run online and

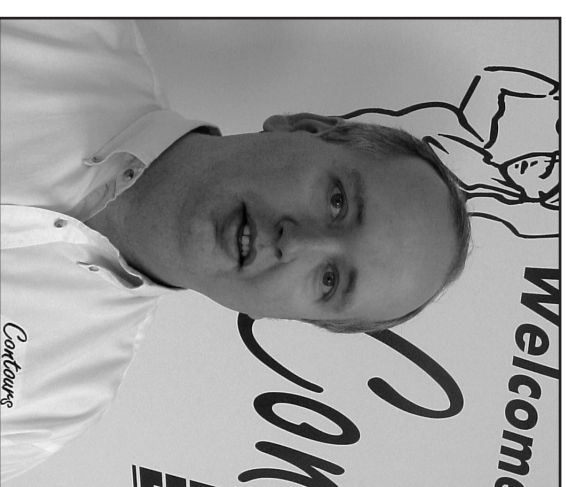


Fitness & Weight Loss Studio

through the Contours Express website ([www.contoursexpress.com](http://www.contoursexpress.com)).

"Without a doubt, the Internet has played a huge role in the development of the company," he smiled. "If I'd have tried to franchise Contours Express 10 or 15 years ago, this would've never happened. The Internet has definitely put this business on the fast track," said Carter. "We get anywhere between 500 and 600 inquiries for franchise information a month."

In recent years, the idea of 'women only' fitness centers has attracted a lot of attention and generated a lot of competition for Contours Express locations. However, Carter isn't worried about those other facilities.



Daren Carter, founder of Contours Express—a women only workout facility

"These competitive clubs have actually helped us," he explained. "They've generated attention for the female-gender concept but where all of the other similar clubs use hydraulic equipment, our big margin of difference is that we use only non-hydraulic equipment scaled down for women, and as a result, the workout is really better."

The success of Contours Express has not gone unnoticed. In June, Pilot Group LP acquired a major stake in the company. "These folks have vast resources, experience and vision which will be used to help escalate and expand the Brand," he noted.

And—what a Brand it is! The Company was the 23rd fastest growing American franchising organization in 2004. It was listed 80th amongst INC. Magazine's fastest growing private companies last year, and was listed within the top 100 franchises in Entrepreneur Magazine's 2004 edition.

Even with the Pilot Group's involvement, Carter will continue to be active with Contours Express. He will continue to serve as CEO of Contours Express International

where he will focus on international growth. Domestic operations will be handled by Contours Express President Bill Helton. Will there be another entrepreneurial Internet concept in Carter's future? "I guess you'll have to ask my mom about that," he smiled.

Bob Quick noted: "Health and physical fitness have become even more important to people in the past several years, and Contours Express has been a leader in the industry. They were at the forefront of the 'women only' club movement, and their Internet marketing strategy was definitely ahead of its time. To go from one location in Nicholasville to over 400 in such a short period of time speaks to Daren Carter's innovative marketing and leadership of the organization."

Commerce Lexington created the "all about the e's" series to spotlight and salute businesses in the Lexington area that have exhibited entrepreneurial spirit.

If you know of other entrepreneurial, e-type ventures in the Lexington area that deserve to be featured in this series, please e-mail Gina Greathouse at: [ggreathouse@commercelexington.com](mailto:ggreathouse@commercelexington.com).

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330 East Main Street, Suite 205  
Lexington, KY 40507  
Phone: (859) 225-5005