

Physiotherapist opens new business in Ashern

By Jennifer McFee

Caitlin Trakalo knows firsthand how physiotherapy can help people get their lives back on track — and now she's sharing that service through her new Interlake business.

The Eriksdale resident is a physiotherapist who opened shop last month in Ashern. However, she didn't always dream of becoming a physiotherapist. Instead, her career trajectory changed drastically after she experienced a life-altering accident in Greece.

Her original plan was to become a police officer, and she dedicated years of her life working towards that goal. After she graduated from the University of Manitoba with a bachelor of arts in criminology in 2008, she embarked on European vacation. Five days into her trip, she was in a quad accident in Corfu, Greece, that changed the course of her life.

"My dad had to come get me. I was in the hospital there for three days and then I flew home. I went straight to HSC and was there for two weeks," said Trakalo, whose father was born in Arborg and raised on a farm in Meleb.

"Because my ankles were so swollen from the travel and the pressure, they had to wait over a week before they could cut me open. If they would've cut me open when I first came home, they wouldn't have been able to close me because of how swollen everything was. It was not comfortable, that's for sure."

The ordeal continued with one surgery each year from 2008 to 2012. Trakalo's initial operation was on both ankles, which put her in a wheelchair for about three months.

"Because I wasn't using all my muscles, I had to learn how to walk again. That was the hardest part of the rehab," she said. "So that's where the physio journey started for me."

Over time, Trakalo developed a close relationship

with her physiotherapist. With her help, she was able to overcome the negative prognoses from her physicians.

"At the end of the day, I thought that if I can do it, I want to help other people to do it too," she said. "I beat the odds, and I wanted to help others do the same."

Since Trakalo had taken a criminology degree, she didn't have any of the pre-requisites to apply for physiotherapy school. In addition to working full time as a policy analyst for Manitoba Lotteries, she took 30 credit hours worth of courses over a two-year period.

When she completed all the pre-requisites, she applied to the program and was accepted. She graduated from the University of Manitoba with a master's degree in physical therapy in 2014.

Trakalo now works as an orthopedic physiotherapist, treating injuries that involve bones, ligaments, muscles, nerves or a sore body. She also treats sports injuries, workplace injuries, and injuries resulting from motor vehicle accidents, as well as pre- and post-operative procedures for orthopedic processes.

"With an injury, it's not just your body that hurts — it's the mental and emotional side too. No matter how big or how small, it affects your life and relationships. You could have a wrist injury that tremendously affects your life," she said.

"I've been there and done that. Every injury is so individual, and a seemingly simple thing can tremendously affect your life. I think it's really important to be noted and taken into account when you're treating someone."

As a result of her education and experience, Trakalo has developed a rare personalized approach to her practice.

"I still experience pain every day and I probably will for the rest of my life. I'll never have full mobility in my feet and one of my legs is longer than the



EXPRESS PHOTO SUBMITTED
Eriksdale resident Caitlin Trakalo launched her new physiotherapy business last month.

other now, so that affects me. But I use my education to figure out what I need to do in order to be as strong and healthy as I possibly can be," she said.

"I've been at the lowest low and I've gotten over that, so I legitimately understand — and that makes a huge difference. I went through many ups and downs after my accident, and that's one of the biggest assets to my physiotherapy career. My personal experience helps me relate to my patients and shows them that you really can slay the dragon."

Caitlin Trakalo Physiotherapy is now open and ready for business at 11 Main St. in Ashern. For more information, call 204-314-0316 or email ctrakphysio@gmail.com.