

# Johnson: Shewfelt realizing a dream by launching his own gymnastics centre

Local Olympic gold medallist has grand plans for 11,000 square foot space in southeast Calgary

BY GEORGE JOHNSON, CALGARY HERALD AUGUST 7, 2013



Olympic gold medallist Kyle Shewfelt is joined by “future gymnasts”, the children of friends and family, as he shows off what will be the gymnasium of his new centre, Kyle Shewfelt Gymnastics, on Wednesday.

**Photograph by:** Ted Rhodes, Calgary Herald

The original idea was actually hatched in the soft, Grecian afterglow of Athens.

“I remember getting back from the Olympics,” Kyle Shewfelt is remembering, “and writing a sticky note to myself.

“It just popped into my head, you know? How cool it would be. I wrote: I want to open a gymnastics centre.

“And now” — he motions around the barren reception area of his new endeavour on 118th Ave., SE — “here we are.”

Nine years on.

Workmen start arriving Thursday to rip out floors, knock down walls, pull down ceilings and begin transforming 11,000 square feet of industrial space into what will, by the end of October, be the site of Kyle Shewfelt Gymnastics.

A place that caters to the grassroots of the sport.

There are, explains the 2004 Olympic gold medallist on floor, already plenty of quality high-level gymnastics clubs and facilities in this city.

His aim is to fill different needs. A gym for the new, the curious, the fitness-conscious.

“For us,” Shewfelt enthuses, “it’s about creating that really fun, friendly, welcoming environment. I think of myself an ambassador for the sport. In Calgary, in Canada and around the world. That’s my legacy. To put back. To give back.

“My role is to get as many people involved as possible. This isn’t about me. It’s about community.

“There’s such a small segment that can actually reach the high-performance level of gymnastics. You need a very specific body type. A very specific focus. And you also need this innate desire.

“So here, yes, I do think we will find ‘the one.’ That special athlete who can go on, compete for, and win, a gold medal. And I bet with the cross-training options we’re planning, we’ll help produce Olympians in other sports, too. Snowboarders. Aerial skiers. You name it.

“But on the same page we’re going to have thousands that improve their physical literacy, have a great time, who just love playing and moving. For the sheer joy of it. I think that’s something that’s missing in today’s education.”

His intent is to stay involved in motivational speaking and continue his role as TV colour commentator on major gymnastics events, but obviously the enormity of this venture will be eating up an awful lot of his time.

Shewfelt coyly won’t divulge a total dollar figure for the startup of such an enterprise (“It’s a BIG number” is as much as he’ll commit to). But with 10 or so investors, a staff of 15-20 and all the energy and effervescence that only Kyle Shewfelt can bring to anything, there are high hopes for success.

“I had some savings, too,” he laughs, “So let’s say I’m . . . fully invested. Sometimes I do wake up at 2:30 a.m. and think ‘Oh, my God . . .’ ”

Those entrepreneurial courses he enrolled in at Mount Royal will certainly come in handy now.

“Hey, I love to be the one responsible for whether something succeeds or whether it fails. And this has given me a great sense of purpose.

“There’s an interesting threshold that everyone crosses. You stand on the edge of the diving board and

then all of a sudden you dive, you commit, or you scramble back to the safety of the pool deck. That happened for me last September. I just decided I was going to figure it out, find investors, make great strategic partnerships with equipment suppliers and find people who can help this enterprise succeed.

“I dove.”

Once fully on board, Shewfelt built an equipment design of essential items, including two in-ground trampoline areas, room for a foam pit and full floor exercise space, balance beams, etc., and went in search of the ideal facility to house his project.

After inspecting 20 or so other buildings, he walked in to the one that now awaits the arrival of the construction crews to re-design, re-model and reimagine 11,000 square feet into Kyle Shewfelt’s idea of a dream gym.

The aim is for an October soft launch with drop-in programs to give people a sneak peek at what’s on offer. Eight-week registered programs, hopes the man with his name on the sign, will begin sometime around the 27th.

“We’re going to base our success on people’s desire to come back week after week, and their desire to tell others about our space. It might start slower but I think it’s going to explode.”

All of nine years later, long removed from the soft Grecian glow of Athens, Kyle Shewfelt is making good on a spur-of-the-moment, at-the-time formless idea that began with a little sticky note-to-self.

“It’s really evolved since then,” he agrees, with a note of wistful disbelief. “There are so many things that go with this . . . leases, lawyers, accountants, payroll. But I’m enjoying the learning.

“I’m doing a lot of visualization about what this can be and that’s really been the driving force for me. I picture the gym here full. I see it. I did that as an athlete, too. I don’t know how many times I’d shut my eyes and imagine myself on the podium. And I got there.

“I need to have a focal point. That brings out the best in me. One thing I’ve learned about myself in this process, and in the process of my life, in becoming an athlete: When I want something bad enough, I figure out a way to make it work.”

George Johnson is the Herald’s sports columnist. E-mail him at [gjohnson@calgaryherald.com](mailto:gjohnson@calgaryherald.com)