

UAlbany

Leaving Her Mark at UAlbany

In a few brief years at the University at Albany, author Toni Morrison garnered accolades – including the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction for her novel *Beloved* – and inspired students and colleagues alike.



true purple

Jessica (Lustig) Fuller,
B.S. '08, M.S. '09



By Carol Olechowski | Photos by Patrick Dodson '12

Jessica (Lustig) Fuller probably never foresaw that her decision to enroll at UAlbany would impact just about every facet of her life, from where she lives to the purple-painted walls of her business, The Hot Yoga Spot. But it has.

A Long Island native, Fuller relocated to the Capital Region in 2005 for what would turn out to be a permanent move. “I’ve always loved this area; it’s such a special place,” she says. After completing her studies in history and psychology and earning a master’s in social-studies secondary education, she married Mike Fuller. They are the parents of Harrison, 3, and newborn Hazel.

Fuller recalls that “there were no teaching jobs when I graduated.” She did substitute teaching for a while but felt “it wasn’t going to go anywhere.”

A practitioner of yoga since her teens, Fuller began working out in local studios and, at age 23, hit upon the idea of starting her own, close to UAlbany. She established The Hot Yoga Spot in late 2010 at the intersection of Western Avenue and Fuller Road, teaching all of the classes herself. Pleased at the studio’s early success, she relocated it a few months later to a 2,700-square-foot site at Stuyvesant Plaza, nearly quadrupling the space available to accommodate an eager influx of new clients.

Within a few years, Fuller established four additional studios in East Greenbush, Latham, Clifton Park, and Saratoga. More than 40 instructors welcome hundreds of students daily; “we have members who come all the time or once a week,” says Fuller.

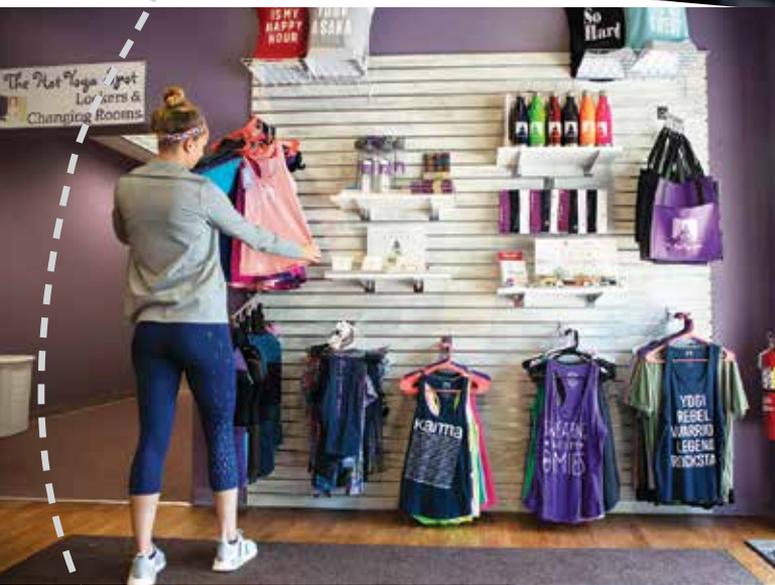
The popular business continues to expand. Instruction levels range from beginner to advanced, and The Hot Yoga Spot’s convenient locations offer members the option of working out close to home or to work. “Yoga appeals to everyone, from high school student-athletes,



to college kids, to seniors seeking relief from chronic pain,” explains Fuller.

The teaching and administrative skills she acquired at UAlbany have been useful in Fuller’s work. As founder and CEO, she is “in charge of customer service, studio schedules, marketing and advertising, business growth,” and other responsibilities associated with the day-to-day operations of a successful company.

Fuller also keeps an eye on the competition: When she opened the Albany outlet, “there were no other hot yoga studios in the Capital Region.” Competition, Fuller adds, “is a natural part” of operating a business. What sets The Hot Yoga Spot – which in 2019 became “the first female-founded franchise born in the Capital Region” – apart from the others? “The quality of our instruction, and the wide assortment of class styles,” she replies. “We have highly trained, knowledgeable teachers leading our classes, so there is something for everyone to enjoy.” In addition, Fuller has been able to hold the line on membership costs; “I still have the same prices I had when I opened.”



In 2018, with friend Annie Berdar, Fuller opened BARE, a vegetarian juice bar adjoining The Hot Yoga Spot at Stuyvesant Plaza. “Everyone wants to eat healthy,” Fuller observes, “and we’re happy to help people make good choices, feel better, and look better.” BARE’s offerings of healthy beverages and snacks include Harry’s PBJ, a smoothie named for Fuller’s son.

Fuller believes in giving back to the community, with The Hot Yoga Spot sponsoring and participating in fundraisers that support various causes. One of her favorites, held each June, is a benefit for the Alzheimer’s Association. In addition, “we donate all of our food scraps to animal shelters in the area,” notes Fuller, who, with friend Kayla Tote, also co-owns CrossFit for the People in Albany.



As vice chair of the School of Education’s Academy for the Advancement of Teaching, Leadership, and Schools Advisory Council and chair of AATLAS’ subcommittee on community outreach and communications, Fuller remains involved with UAlbany. Her longtime friendships with former classmates Jaimie Anzelone, Peter Mentnech, Alex Murphy, Matt Barnes, and Lorne Heilbronn also keep her close to the University. The Long Island natives all met freshman year.

“UAlbany definitely changed my life and set me on the course for everything I’ve had since,” says Fuller, smiling as she points to The Hot Yoga Spot’s purple walls.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP AND BOTTOM: THE HOT YOGA SPOT FOUNDER AND CEO JESSICA FULLER WELCOMES CLIENTS AND TEACHES A CLASS AT THE STUYVESANT PLAZA STUDIO; CENTER: A CUSTOMER BROWSES A MERCHANDISE DISPLAY. BELOW: FULLER AND FRIEND ANNIE BERDAR POSE AT BARE, THE VEGETARIAN JUICE BAR THEY CO-FOUNDED; BERDAR SERVES UP A BEVERAGE.

