

# TRAIL BLAZERS

**The outdoor sports industry may have once been considered dudes' territory, but those days are long gone. And a few dauntlessly determined women took the first steps to make that happen.**

By Jessica Ridenour

**Gert Boyle**  
Columbia Sportswear  
[www.columbia.com](http://www.columbia.com)

When in 1970 Neal Boyle, 47, then president of the struggling Columbia Sportswear, died suddenly from a heart attack, everyone, including his wife, Gert, questioned the fate of the company. But with zero business experience and a chorus of naysayers who doubted a woman could run the company, Gert took the reins of the Portland, Oregon-based firm that her father founded back in 1938 after escaping Nazi Germany.

What made the 46-year-old housewife and mother of three show up at work three days after her husband's death? A crippling Small Business Administration loan to the tune of \$150,000 was one reason. "Money is a real motivator," admits Gert, "and poverty was not something that I was looking forward to." Advisers suggested that Gert put a man in charge or sell the struggling business, but with help from her son, Tim, she pressed on.

It took years but eventually the company was in the black, thanks partly to a humorous "tough mother" ad campaign in which Gert was portrayed as a no-nonsense taskmaster hell-bent on guaranteeing high-quality products

**Missy Park**  
Title Nine  
[www.titlenine.com](http://www.titlenine.com)

"Sports have always been such a critical part of my life," says 44-year-old Missy Park, "transformative, really." The life of the Greenville, South Carolina, native was forever changed by the watershed 1972 Title IX legislation giving girls equal access to sports, which went into effect just in time for Missy to start high school.

Consider that the high school basketball player comes from a family of entrepreneurs, (her father and three siblings are all business owners), and it's no surprise that she combined her passion for sports with inherent business smarts to form Title Nine—one of the first U.S. companies to specialize in women's athletic wear—based in Emeryville, California.

In 1989 after a short stint with The North Face and Fisher Mountain Bikes, the athlete, who also played basketball and lacrosse at Yale University, felt uniquely qualified to start her own business, she says, laughing at the optimistic naiveté of her 25-year-old self. "It was just a way to sort of integrate all the parts of my life," she says. "The great thing about the sport-ing-goods industry is there are a lot of like-minded people in it.

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(a designation that belies her kind demeanor and quick wit). Another turning point was the advent of the Bugaboo, a wildly popular three-in-one ski parka. "We receive mail, even to this day, saying, 'I still have my original Bugaboo,'" says the 83-year-old Gert. "I always write them and tell them, 'Thank you very much, but you need to get another one.'"

Today, with 13,000 retailers in 72 countries, there's no denying the company's success. Gert was inspired to succeed not only to prove the cynics wrong but by her profitable neighbors. "When you have people like Nike and Adidas in your backyard, you sort of say, 'Why can't I do that?'"

Gert now chairs the board of directors, having passed the title of president along to Tim in 1988. Even at an age when most people are long retired, she still shows up to work every day—after a morning routine of water aerobics—to deal with paperwork and public appearances and to ensure that Columbia's product quality meets expectations. "I don't design clothes anymore but I do criticize," says the matriarch, who co-authored her life story titled *One Tough Mother: Success in Life, Business, and Apple Pie* (WestWinds Press, 2005). "Besides, if I didn't work, I would have had to stay home and play with the little old ladies, and I don't want to do that."

While Gert certainly deserves accolades for not giving up when the going got tough, she's quick to point out that there's no I in team. "I did not do this by myself," says the philanthropist, who donates time and money to the Special Olympics, among other causes. "We now have over 3,000 employees, and I didn't do it alone."

Their idea of a business meeting is going for a mountain bike ride."

The mother of two (Gillie, eight, and Leo, five) considers herself somewhat of an evangelist when it comes to the transformative power of sports in a woman's life. She encourages women to not only get involved themselves but to coach kids' sports as well, even if they don't consider themselves experts.

"It's very important for me to coach soccer because if a guy has never played soccer and his son needs a soccer coach, he jumps right in there," says Missy, who's also coached basketball since she was a teen. "What I see often is that women say, 'Well, I'll head up the snack committee, but I don't want to coach.' I think it's important for our kids to see both men and women being competent and proficient in a very physical way."

The gospel and passion of athletics applies to the Title Nine office as well. When Missy hires a new employee, she asks about his or her greatest sports moment, even if it was as simple as learning how to ride a bike.

Naturally, the company needs to be profitable to survive, but that's not Missy's biggest concern. "The bottom line is not, in fact, the bottom line," she says. "It's this secondary thing of making sure we're still a place that's making sports and fitness something that everybody wants to incorporate in their lives."

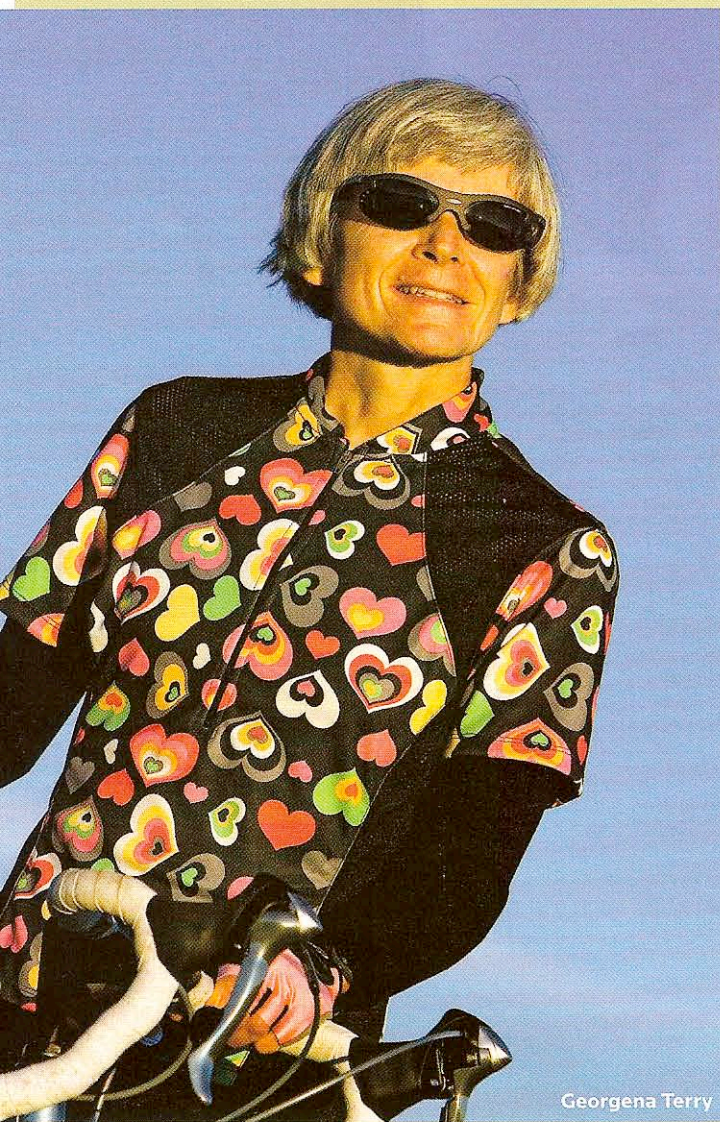
## Sally Jewell

REI

[www.rei.com](http://www.rei.com)

How does a woman make the leap from 19 years as a banker to being the chief executive officer of REI? A heartfelt respect for the environment certainly helps. It was during the 16 years that Sally Jewell spent volunteering with the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust, a group that works to protect the wild places along I-90 through the Pacific Northwest's Cascade Range, that REI approached her to be on its board of directors. Several years on the board turned into a chief operating officer position in 2000, and in March 2005 she became the outdoor retailer's first female CEO.

Today Sally's environmental and humanitarian activism continues, both at REI and in the world at large. Tired of catering to what she calls "the skinny white hard body," she's made it her mission for REI to reach out to a wider variety of people. "Making the outdoors welcoming to everyone is essential to our future as an industry," she says. Another objective is making REI's environmental footprint the smallest it can be; to that end the retailer has donated millions to conservation grants and in 2006 purchased 11 million kilowatt hours of green power.



Georgena Terry

The mother of two college-age kids is also concerned with eradicating global poverty, which is why she's working with the Initiative for Global Development, a group of business leaders who hope to do just that. "It is ridiculous to me that we live in this land of plenty, where we are really taking advantage of our planet's resources, when two-thirds of the world lives in extreme poverty, making less than a dollar a day," she says. "I have a hard time living with that."

To say that Sally has a full plate would be an understatement. When she's not sitting in meetings, traveling to conferences, giving speeches, or visiting stores to meet with employees, she makes time to get outside, kayaking on the south Puget Sound or climbing with the chair of the board of directors. "I don't do too much hanging out," says the busy CEO.

But the hectic schedule is worth it for Sally, especially when she reads letters from customers describing the positive impact that REI has had on their lives. She admits that these heartwarming stories often move her to tears, but she isn't the slightest bit embarrassed to be seen sobbing over her daily mail.

"I think it's certainly told people around REI that it's okay to cry because the CEO does it all the time," she says, laughing.

## Georgena Terry

Terry Precision Cycling

[www.terrybicycles.com](http://www.terrybicycles.com)

When Georgena Terry, 56, started making bicycle frames in her basement more than two decades ago, she had no idea it would be the start of a small empire. "It grew out of a hobby," says the avid cyclist and former mechanical engineer for Xerox. Armed with an oxy-acetylene torch and a couple of how-to books, the self-taught welder tinkered with frames "just for the heck of it." Then came the special requests. Her girlfriends, fed up with the aches and sore spots associated with riding ill-fitting men's bikes, begged Georgena to make female-friendly frames for them. At a New England bicycle rally in the mideighties, Georgena's vision became clear. "I took a bunch of hand-built bikes with me and sold them all within a couple of hours; I thought, Man, if it's this easy, I need to go full tilt."

Today, based in Macedon, New York, the enterprise is enjoying ample success, peddling bikes, saddles, and other gear in more than 260 stores nationwide. Although women's-specific bicycles are so in demand that other manufacturers are copying Georgena's designs (and claiming that they discovered the market for women's bikes as well), Georgena nevertheless faces some gender bias. "The biggest challenge is still getting independent bicycle dealers to embrace—not pay lip service to—the concept of bicycles for women," she says.

But the self-described eternal optimist, who battled polio as a child, isn't sweating the small stuff. Instead she's focused on making her bikes the best they can be. Since the addition of accessories and apparel to her growing business, she worries that the original concept has taken a backseat. "I don't feel personally responsible for a saddle or a pair of shorts," she says, "but the bikes—that's my baby and I want to really see them shine." The company now offers five different models.

Obviously, bicycles are a fundamental aspect of Georgena's life, and most weekends you'll find her riding. "If I'm in town, it's great because I can go right out my back door into miles and miles of country roads with very little traffic on them," she says. Not surprisingly, the nature lover is a dedicated environmentalist who envisions her retirement years spent as a political activist. "I think environmentalists and conservationists need to get down and dirty again a little bit," she says. "We need voices, lots of voices."

# What Makes 'em Tick?

## Gert Boyle

- ➔ Personal motto: Early to bed, early to rise, work my tail and advertise.
- ➔ Favorite movie: *Borat* ("People say that it's controversial, but it's better to laugh than to cry.")
- ➔ Best advice ever received: If you can't do your best today, do your best tomorrow.



Ayn Rand

## Missy Park

- ➔ Personal motto: Fail faster, succeed sooner.
- ➔ Favorite movie: *Broadcast News*
- ➔ Favorite book: *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand

## Georgena Terry

- ➔ Favorite movie: *Winged Migration*
- ➔ Favorite book: *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand
- ➔ Favorite quote: "Polite conservationists leave no mark save the scars upon the Earth that could have been prevented had they stood their ground." —David Ross Brower, founder of the Earth Island Institute and former executive director of the Sierra Club

## Sally Jewel

- ➔ Favorite quote: "Never underestimate the ability of a small group of people to change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." —Margaret Mead
- ➔ Recent read: *Beyond Mountains* by Tracy Kidder

## Jamie Little

- ➔ Favorite movie: *Walk the Line*
- ➔ Favorite book: *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom* by Don Miguel Ruiz
- ➔ Favorite vacation spot: Lake Tahoe, California

Jamie Little  
ESPN and ABC Sports  
[www.jamielittle.com](http://www.jamielittle.com)

"I was always a tomboy—always hanging out with the boys," recalls Las Vegas native Jamie Little, 28. Horseback riding was her pastime of choice until a fateful meeting at age 14 with Motocross legend Carey Hart inspired her to trade in four legs for two wheels. She admits to having a crush on the dirt bike champ, but her true love was with the sport itself. "When I was introduced to dirt bikes, I had a natural affinity for it," says Jamie, who remembers the excitement of riding on the back of her dad's Harley as a young girl.

Today the San Diego State University journalism grad has turned her passion for motor sports into a career, reporting on

As the first female pit reporter for the Indy 500, Jamie's proving that women are just as good as men at getting down and dirty. Thanks to her knowledge and love for motor sports, not to mention her affable nature and on-camera confidence, she's been warmly welcomed into an otherwise male-dominated community.

"I think at first you have to prove yourself, but your history, your reputation, is everything when you're starting out," says Jamie, who now travels to events 40 weekends per year. "I've worked very hard because it's really easy to lose that respect if you come in and you don't know what you're doing and you're not prepared."

To get prepared the pit reporter not only researches each race beforehand but doesn't shy away from getting behind the wheel herself. A former downhill mountain bike racer, Jamie owns three dirt

After a few more years of working the pits without pay and learning all there is to know about racing, Jamie auditioned as a Supercross announcer and got the gig. That was only the beginning.

IndyCar, Supercross, Motocross, and the X Games for both *ESPN* and *ABC Sports*. After a short stint as a model at age 18 (she decided she'd rather use her brains than her beauty to make a living), she approached an *ESPN* cameraperson at a race, who ended up mentoring her for the next year and a half. After a few more years of working the pits without pay and learning all there is to know about racing, Jamie auditioned as a Supercross announcer and got the gig. That was only the beginning.

bikes and even earned a license from auto-racing school. "If the opportunity arose and somebody gave me a shot, I'd race a car," she says. Jamie also enjoys wakeboarding and golfing in her spare time. "I love it."

Not one to back down from a challenge, this year Jamie has signed on to report for NASCAR. Although she's nervous and excited to take on an assignment that has such a huge and loyal following, her strategy for success is simple: "I hope that I can come out swinging, be myself, and do what I've always done," she says. "I'll walk away saying, 'All right, that was the best year of my life. I did it.'" **WVA**