

Sit Strong Systems'

dual-purpose chair
promotes healthier
lifestyles

**This family-run business
creates comfortable chairs
that double as fitness
centers, breaking stereotypes
of equipment—and perhaps
barriers to physical activity**



This is the third article in a series profiling the recipients of the 2010 ICAA Innovators Awards. Launched by the International Council on Active Aging® in 2003, these awards recognize creativity and excellence in active aging, honoring innovations that are leading the way, setting new standards and making a difference in the lives of older adults. These offerings target any or all of the seven dimensions of wellness—namely, physical, spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional, vocational and environmental wellness. ICAA supports professionals who develop wellness facilities, programs and services for adults ages 50 and over.

Located in Hickory, North Carolina, Sit Strong Systems supports “fitness in comfort” with its patented exercise chairs. The company, a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business, was started in 2009 by the Bolick family—father Charles and sons Tim and David—who together have over 100 years in the furniture industry. “We recognized a need for an easy-to-use exercise/fitness chair that is esthetically pleasing,” says founder and co-owner Charles Bolick. So he invented it.

Sit Strong created its exercise chair, the elder Bolick explains, specifically to give older adults and other users “a multifunctional chair or recliner that promotes healthier lifestyles.” In residential and healthcare settings, these attractive pieces of furniture are comfortable and familiar—yet hide the tools for a total-body conditioning workout. Resistance bands, positioned in five locations inside the exercise chair, provide resistance from various directions and work every major muscle group in the body, according to the Sit Strong website. “With a flip of a cushion or arm, you have resistance at your fingertips,” Bolick adds.

The Sit Strong exercise chair provides the means for older adults to improve their strength, flexibility and mobility. The product has a number of other features that make it attractive to this market. For instance, the chair’s two-in-one function means this piece of fitness equipment does not take up additional space (a benefit for individuals who live in smaller spaces); it also does not need to be moved or put away (a benefit for those who are frail or have poorer physical strength and function).

To continue creating effective wellness offerings for clients, the active-aging industry depends on innovative products and solutions. The Sit Strong chair caught the attention of the International Council on Active Aging® in its 2010 ICAA Innovators Awards competition, earning the product a 2010 ICAA Innovative Solutions Award. This award category recognizes North America’s most creative wellness products and solutions for active older adults.

Sit Strong has “repurposed” a piece of furniture that, for many, symbolizes an inactive lifestyle—the recliner—and transformed it with hidden resistance bands into a fitness tool. In the process, the company has overturned the stereotype of fitness equipment. The chair may also help older adults overcome barriers to physical activity, thanks to its easy accessibility, simplicity and familiarity for users.

To learn more, the *Journal on Active Aging*® recently asked Charles Bolick about Sit Strong’s exercise chair and what was involved in bringing the product to the active-aging market.

JAA: *What motivated Sit Strong Systems to create its exercise chairs?*

CB: We saw a great need for making it easier for all ages to exercise. After many years of using resistance bands, and personally benefiting from them, I wanted

to find a way to incorporate these bands into an everyday chair that could fit in anyone’s home. These chairs are Sit Strong Systems’ commitment to innovation, motivation, and passion for helping people embrace a healthier lifestyle.

JAA: *Please describe the exercise chair concept, along with its various features.*

CB: It’s a revolutionary concept: a dual-purpose recliner. Individuals not only can use the chair to exercise all parts of the body, but they also have a great-looking piece of furniture. They do not have to put this fitness equipment in the corner, under the bed, or in the closet. The resistance bands in the chair can be changed from the lightest resistance to the most difficult, giving users multiple resistance levels, and allowing over 40 exercises that work every muscle group in the body. The chair is engineered to be used in reclining, sitting or standing positions. It’s also available to operate in manual or electric mode.

JAA: *Would you please give readers an idea of the range of exercises available to users of Sit Strong’s exercise chairs, and the impact of this activity on health and well-being?*

CB: Because the Sit Strong Systems chair was designed to be used while standing, sitting or reclining, it gives users a full range of all exercises. For example, if you’re sitting upright in the chair, you are able to perform arm curls; by fully reclining, you increase your range of motion to achieve a full arm curl. In addition, you can perform an additional arm curl exercise by standing beside the chair. Suggested exercise groups include chest and shoulders, midsection, back, legs, arms, biceps and triceps.

As agreed by the American Heart Association Science Advisory and Coordinating Committee, resistance band training

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has been shown to have many health and fitness benefits, including helping to maintain muscular strength, endurance and mass. This kind of training can also be beneficial to, but not limited to, the prevention and management of chronic conditions, lower back pain, osteoporosis, obesity and weight control, sarcopenia, and diabetes. It also assists in the maintenance of basal metabolic rate and promotes independence. Further, resistance training helps prevent falls and limits susceptibility to falls. It also helps impaired physical function in frail and older adults and contributes to the prevention of and rehabilitation from orthopedic injuries.

Consequently, most professional and government health associations or agencies now support the inclusion of resistance training in their current recommendations and guidelines.

JAA: *What were the key elements involved in the design and development of Sit Strong's dual-purpose chairs?*

CB: Along with the idea of creating an esthetically pleasing chair that provides exercise capabilities, we addressed many avenues in designing the chairs. We gathered information from orthopedists, physical therapists, and even engineers. These professionals gave us insight into the different exercises the chair needed to be able to perform in order to help individuals rehabilitate or maintain strength. The engineers provided input about the brackets used in the chair to house the individual pins and rollers that the bands travel over, therefore maintaining longevity of the bands. And individuals who used the chair—including retirees, wounded warriors and other veterans—gave us additional insight and positive feedback.

JAA: *In light of the diversity of older adults and their wide-ranging needs as well as the various settings that serve this population, what do you see as the key benefits of the Sit Strong exercise chair for the active-aging market?*

CB: The main benefit that Sit Strong chairs provide is a better lifestyle. Resistance training can increase strength and flexibility and literally turn back the clock on the effects aging has on the body. The additions of muscle mass, denser bones and lower body weight improve balance, coordination and mobility. Further, our chairs can be used in a variety of settings—for group activities, rehabilitation, or simply in an apartment or individual room, for example. The chairs are also comfortable and very user-friendly.

JAA: *Most companies encounter some challenges in developing and rolling out a*

new product or introducing a product to a new market. What challenges have you addressed?

CB: When making the decision to start Sit Strong Systems and manufacture the product, we addressed a number of things. We first decided to patent the concept of “a seating device having exercise functionality,” therefore a prior art search was conducted to make sure there was not another product like it on the market.

The main focus when developing the chair was positioning the brackets—we had to ensure these were positioned so users could perform the most exercises. We also had to meet the need for multiple resistance levels. We achieved this by incorporating three different bands into each bracket, allowing the user to obtain the least or most resistance desired on any exercise. A company brochure demonstrating all exercises can be viewed on the Sit Strong website.

JAA: *How is Sit Strong Systems building awareness within the active-aging industry about its exercise chairs?*

CB: We began building awareness by testing several models with a variety of individuals. Chairs were tested at local retirement facilities, State Veterans Homes, and at the Wounded Warrior Project for rehabilitating injured soldiers. The response was very positive for all settings.

To reach the active-aging industry, we joined ICAA's Preferred Vendor Program, which allows us to showcase our product information and video on ICAA's online directory. We also recently named Dynamic Wellness Solutions, another ICAA Preferred Vendor, as the company's distributor for the active-aging market. In addition, anyone can view product information or watch videos and learn more about Sit Strong chairs on our website.

**Sit Strong exercise chairs:
three key selling points for
the active-aging market**

1. Ease of use
2. Increases strength and flexibility
3. Comfort (doubles as a nice, comfortable chair)

JAA: *In your view, what do Sit Strong chairs offer older adults, regardless of age or physical condition, to enhance their ability to lead a healthier, more active life?*

CB: Users get a quality piece of furniture that, with the flip of a cushion, turns into a workout center. The exercise chair is also convenient. There's no need for people to bring out equipment from under the bed or in the closet to use, or put it

away afterwards. In addition, resistance bands are easier on the joints, providing a consistent workout. Finally, users can exercise while watching TV in the comfort of their own surroundings.

JAA: *How do you see Sit Strong's exercise chairs helping to advance the active-aging industry?*

CB: We offer an esthetically pleasing piece of usable furniture that doubles as a fitness center. Sit Strong chairs give users a feeling of comfort, familiarity and pleasure, which we believe they typically do not associate with fitness equipment. As a result, older adults may see this equipment as less intimidating to use. Because they incorporate resistance bands, our chairs also make exercising convenient, as users don't have to leave home to work out. In our view, this product can aid a recovering rehabilita-

tion patient, train an injured athlete, or serve as a home gym.

JAA: *Finally, where do you see Sit Strong Systems in five years?*

CB: We'll continue to make product available for all market segments, with concentrated effort on the active-aging industry. Our commitment to innovation, motivation and passion will continue to help people embrace a healthier lifestyle worldwide. ☺

The Journal on Active Aging thanks Charles and David Bolick for their help with this article. For more information about the Sit Strong Systems exercise chair, visit www.sitstrongsystems.com.

Images courtesy of Sit Strong Systems

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