

far and wide. It's all the layers," says Elizabeth, who did most of the designing.

There were other changes to contend with—changes that affected the entire textile industry. "If we were going to be competitive, we had to take it offshore," notes Ellen. "We really didn't have many options in the United States." But taking it offshore, created a new set of headaches. "The cost of running a business internationally is enormous...the cost of managing widely decentralized manufacturing." Clothes cut in the states were sewn half a world away and embroidered in another continent in the opposite direction. "Two different countries, two different cultures; it just required a whole lot more maneuverability." They longed for the simpler times, when they could drive three hours to a factory in Pennsylvania to solve a problem. Now it was taking them that much time and more just waiting in airports to catch flights to Central America. "And forget China," says Elizabeth with an eye roll. "Life became very different in the last seven years."

In 2002, the Russell Corporation, a big company that specialized in college football uniforms, decided to expand into higher-end brands. "So, they went on a shopping spree and Moving Comfort is one of the brands they bought," says Ellen. The two partners stayed on for three years under a management contract. "And then January of 2006, we said 'You know, it's been 29 years; it's time to move on,'" says Elizabeth. "We were not having fun," continues Ellen. Moving Comfort was now a publicly held corporation; "very cumbersome and very bureaucratic. I'm so glad to have had that experience and to have seen things from that perspective, but it's not a place that I want to live for very long."

Meanwhile, Elizabeth had mentioned to her sister-in-law, who lives in Crozet, that "One day I'd like to own a B&B." The sister-in-law took that to be "an action plan," according to Elizabeth's husband Jay Billie. One thing led to another, and they bought a circa 1910 farmhouse named Westwood in



Photo by Michael Winter
Both avid runners, Ellen Wessel (left) and Elizabeth Goeke were a perfect fit as business partners: Ellen saw the big picture; Elizabeth paid attention to details.



Contributed photo
This past May, Elizabeth Goeke and Ellen Wessel were inducted into the National Sporting Goods Industry Hall of Fame, joining the likes of Albert Spaulding and William J. Voit. Only two other women have been inducted since the hall of fame's creation 53 years ago.

Montford in 2004. After the usual head-to-toe renovation job, which included finishing an addition to double their number of guest rooms, they opened as the Inn at Westwood Farm in September of 2007.

Running a B&B is a long way from running shorts. "It certainly is, Ollie," laughs Elizabeth mimicking Stanley of Laurel and Hardy fame. In 2006, Ellen called up and said, "I don't see any point in my staying in Northern Virginia and I've seen you most every day for 29 years. So, you and Jay have to find me a house in Orange." So, they did. And Ellen landed a job at Montpelier as Michael Quinn's assistant, which she loves. "It is so much fun not being the president of a company," she sighs in relief.

Neither of them run anymore; Elizabeth because of a fused disk between her C5 and C6, an injury she thinks she got from carrying heavy laptops through airports, not running. Ellen is more into hot yoga, these days. "I found as I got older that running was not the most efficient way to stay fit." She might take up horseback riding again, because at one point she was competing in three day eventing at the preliminary level.

Moving Comfort continues. Their products and designs are sold at Ragged Mountain and Downtown Athletic in Charlottesville, and they appear in R.E.I., Title Nine, and L.L. Bean catalogs. And there is one other place you can find Ellen Wessel and Elizabeth Goeke...in the Sporting Goods Industry Hall of Fame.

There they are, two of the five inductees for 2009. Only two other women are included in this august group of 170 since it was started in 1956. One of them is a Cabella sibling, of the hunting and fishing catalog fame; the other helped found the Columbia Sportswear Company.

Yes indeed, there's Ellen and Elizabeth in the company of men like Ole Evinrude, Albert Spaulding, Samuel Colt, Eliphalet Remington, William J. Voit, even E.I. du Pont de Nemours...a perfect fit.



Photo by Phil Audibert
After 29 years as business partners, Elizabeth Goeke (left) and Ellen Wessel are still best friends. Together they built Moving Comfort into a major women's sports apparel business.

Moving Comfort: a perfect fit

They might not have met had it not been for a boyfriend; that and the relatively new fangled sport, for women anyway, of running.

The year was 1977. Ellen Wessel was running 70 miles a week; had founded the Washington, D.C. area's first women's running club, called RunHers. "I was a serious marathoner. That was my life," she states flatly. At 70 miles a week, that's an understatement.

She was also uncomfortable. "When you're running those kinds of distances, your equipment has to be finely tuned. You

notice everything, and chafing is probably one of the biggest banes of distance running." So, she decided to do something about it: to design and manufacture running shorts for women, because men's shorts did not fit and unisex were "just a dumbed-down men's short."

Elizabeth Goeke (pronounced Go-Key) meanwhile, was apprenticing with a master tailor. "I figured I'd be in the House of Chanel some day or Ralph Lauren or Calvin Klein, not mass producing running shorts." She had taken up running too, but not as much as 70 miles a week. Still, the sport



"We understand, naturally, how a woman's body moves and we understand as athletes the kind of freedom she needs in a garment. Every detail of cut, weight, fit and feel means as much to us as it does to you."

"And although when you go shopping today you'll see other brands on the racks, you'll never find another company that runs, bikes, hikes, walks, talks, rides, trains and dreams women's athletic wear the way we do."

was growing on her.

Now here comes the complicated part: Elizabeth's current boyfriend at the time, who was Ellen's ex boyfriend but who was also still friends with her brother, gave Elizabeth, for her birthday, a pair of running shorts that Ellen made. And Elizabeth took them back to the store to return them because "they didn't fit."

One thing led to another and through the boyfriend's contact with Ellen's brother, the two women met. And Ellen gave Elizabeth a newly designed pair of shorts to try. Ellen went off to run the New York Marathon, while Elizabeth went down to the canal tow path in Georgetown, where every mile is marked. "I was so excited that I actually ran seven miles," she says breathlessly.

These were better, not perfect, mind you, but better. "I handed her a soggy pair of mediums and said 'Yeah, they're better but they need work,'" critiqued Elizabeth. "Would you help me?" countered Ellen. Elizabeth, who was working for Woodward and Lothrop in Chevy Chase, agreed. She set to work to improve the design. And from those better-fitting shorts, Ellen and Elizabeth built the Moving Comfort brand into an international women's sports apparel company.

What's truly remarkable here is that they're still talking to each other. In fact, they are still best friends and live an easy jog away from each other in Orange County. Like their shorts, and bras, and tops and tees and tights and windproof, waterproof, breathable outerwear, they are a perfect fit.

"Really, for the better part of our career it was a privately owned, privately held company, for 25 years. And to have a business partner for that long..." Elizabeth lets the sentence dangle, and Ellen is at a loss for words to complete it.

Didn't they ever argue? "Oh yeah," agrees Elizabeth. "It was actually a lesson for most people that are married. Stand your ground and find a way to make it work...Our styles are different but our values and our principles are always on the same page."

Ellen returns the favor. "She would notice things I would never notice...the attention to the details and the

fit." When asked what she appreciates most about Ellen, Elizabeth counters with "her integrity, for one thing, plus Ellen's ability to carry the message in terms of what Moving Comfort was about." And so it really was a perfect fit: the big picture dovetailing neatly with the detail person, something like Jack Sprat and his wife, although neither one is anything close to being fat.

And to think it all started with a pair of shorts.

Shorts, you say...other than small, medium and large, what's the difference? Well, that's just a rectangle talking. You see, men are rectangles; women are squares.

Say what?

Elizabeth explains that men have a short rise from the crotch to the waist, adding that "men generally don't have much in the way of hips, their waist and their hips are the same size." This describes the rectangular shape of a man's mid section. Women go in at the waist and out at the hips, and back in below the butt, like a square. "So if you were wearing men's shorts, they were riding up on your hips and were just not very comfortable. You're running a lot of miles and you wind up with a lot of chafing and discomfort in between your legs." Basically, in a marathon we're talking about running for three and four hours with a wedgie.

Back in 1977, little running shops, like Ragged Mountain in Charlottesville, were cropping up, everywhere. "And they were starting to get women coming in and asking for something for themselves, because women were getting more vocal; they were more interable outerwear, they are a perfect fit.

ested in running," continues Ellen. Moving Comfort could fill that need; it was the "only game in town." Ellen remembers cutting layers of cloth on her kitchen table, then jumping in the car to deliver little kits to a "tiny network of four home sewers all strategically placed around the beltway."

But now that Elizabeth was on board, it was time to expand. "I think you want to work on the pattern before you do that," cautioned Elizabeth who took six weeks to perfect the design before they went in search of a factory to mass produce them. They found the factory in Columbia, S.C. a mom and pop "in the back room of the Laundromat of the trailer park they lived in." Elizabeth



Contributed photo

Elizabeth Goeke models some Moving Comfort breathable windproof/waterproof outerwear in a company brochure.



Photos by Phil Audibert

Above, Elizabeth Goeke and her husband Jay Billie moved to Orange in 2004 to establish their bed and breakfast, the Inn at Westwood Farm. Two years later, Ellen Wessel moved to Orange as well to be closer to her friend and business partner. Below, after extensive renovations, the Inn at Westwood Farm opened its doors to the public in September 2007.



had never been further south than Charlottesville. She was 23 years old when she boarded that train for Columbia. "Ten years later they had a two-floor factory, fully air-conditioned, employed a 175, 200 people...they did a lot of business with us over the years."

The whole experience was a steep learning curve. "Neither one of us had any business training," admits Ellen. "So, over the years, we accumulated a lot of wisdom and a lot of knowledge." Take the world of finance for example. "Borrowing money, we were on a tight leash." They paid six above prime and prime back then was 20 percent! "Dancin' with the devil," comments Elizabeth, as she points to other companies headed by famous men marathoners who borrowed too much, grew too fast, and went belly up.

But Moving Comfort not only survived, it thrived. "I'm proud of two things mostly," continues Ellen. "That we survived and managed to weather all of that and to do it with integrity. We heard banks refer to us as a 'character loan.' It wasn't because we had deep pockets or a whole lot of assets, but people just felt that no matter what, we were going to figure out a way to pay money back." And they did.

They also noticed a change in the attitude of retailers when they knocked on their doors to pedal their product. "You're walking in there and you're trying to sell them a pair of four ounce women's running shorts and they're looking at you like you have 16 eyes and no brain cells. 'What do I need those for? Women don't come in here,'" Elizabeth remembers them scoffing.

"Yeah, well, maybe they would come in here if you actually had something for them to buy!" she would counter.

"What are your colors?" they'd ask... "Orange, blue, gold, standard team colors?" Moving Comfort offered taupe and mauve and something called sun gold yellow. "Oh you're off the charts," they would say. Elizabeth grins and adds, "Fast forward, 10 years later. 'What's the new color for this month?'" they would ask eagerly. "They really got into it after awhile."

Right about the time that Moving Comfort was producing women-friendly shorts, another small start-up

was addressing that other issue with women and running, the top half of the body. The company was called Jogbra, and through what could only be called a gentlewoman's agreement, Moving Comfort did not compete with them, until Playtex and later Champion picked them up. Then all bets were off.

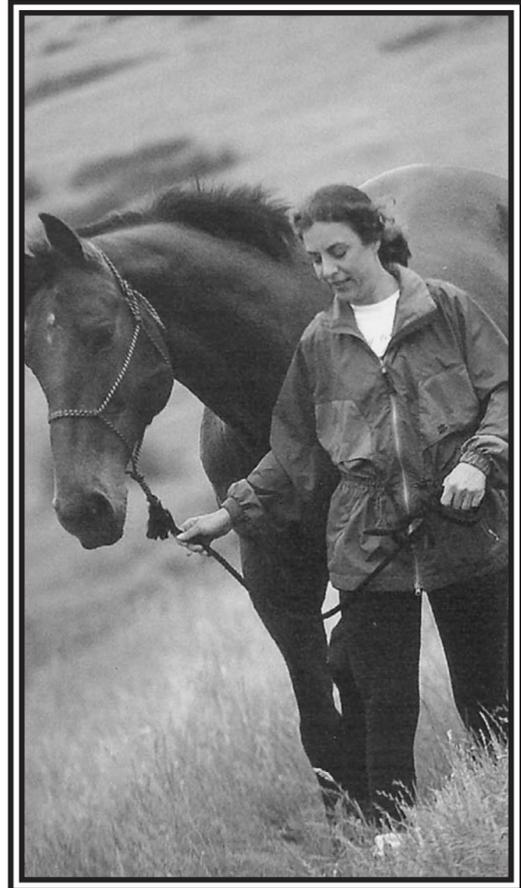
Horror stories abound of what women did in those early days. "When you're small, it's mostly moisture management and not chafing. But, the larger breasted women, the stories you would hear about what they would do to manage the motion." Ellen visibly shudders.

"Taping themselves, wearing several bras," continues Elizabeth, "putting washcloths under straps, chafing beyond belief, front and back." Believe it or not, the first running bra was an adaptation of a jock strap! "That's how they started. We referred to it actually as the uni-boob look, because it was really total compression. Smash 'em and keep them close to the vest."

It was only logical that Moving Comfort would go into the sports bra business. "I would say that some of our products could be considered liberators for women," notes Ellen proudly. She points to their Athena line for large breasted women. "We just got these raving testimonials that a woman could run a whole marathon and not be thinking about how uncomfortable she was." Today, bras are 70 percent of Moving Comfort's sales.

Another change they witnessed was the development of new high-tech materials. "We started out basically with poly-cotton. Poly-cotton Lycra was an advance. But then the quality of the technical fabrics, the wicking properties, and the wind-proofing properties and how you could get a warm garment that has no weight to it. It's been remarkable. I can remember back in the late '70s, to go out in the cold weather, you basically you'd be putting on layers and layers and maybe a shell on top of all that. You looked like a Michelin man," says Ellen.

"Moving comfort makes everything from the most important piece of equipment that most women need, which is a sports bra, to waterproof breathable outerwear: shorts, tops, tights, knit pants, the range is pretty



Contributed photo

In addition to running 70 miles per week, Ellen Wessel was also a three day event rider at the preliminary level.