

# Olympics rub therapist right way

## Mt. Kisco massage expert kept athletes ready to compete

Chris Serico  
The Patent Trader

A Mount Kisco massage therapist took time off this summer to ease the aches and pains of Olympic athletes competing in Greece.

Simona Cipriani normally offers massage and Pilates instruction to clients at her West Main Street business, Art of Control.

But a few months ago, when the native Italian read in a Connecticut Center for Massage Therapy bulletin that Athens needed massage therapists to volunteer, she could not turn down the opportunity.

Cipriani said once she discovered she was one of 160 massage therapists who were selected from 500 international applicants, she began packing her bags for a three-week odyssey.

### First Impressions

Cipriani arrived in Greece July 29, a couple of days prior to orientation. Before she and her



Aaron Houston/The Patent Trader

Studio owner Simona Cipriani massages a client Sept. 1 at The Art of Control, a Pilates studio in Mount Kisco that offers massage therapy. Cipriani recently returned from Athens, where she gave massages in the Olympic Village to athletes from all countries.

peers could begin setting up the massage tables at the Athena and Phevos recreational buildings, they were issued identification badges so they would have access to the Olympic venues and village, which Cipriani said were heavily guarded.

"I felt extremely safe," she said. "In the city, there was one military (unit) in every corner.

To get in the actual village, first of all, you had to go through the metal detectors. If you didn't have your pass, there was no way you could get in. They didn't want us to bring anything except a fanny pack that they gave us and nothing else."

Cipriani said her first week in

**Please see MASSAGE, A3**

# Local business owner goes to Olympics

MASSAGE, from A1

the village wasn't busy. Little by little, coaches and personal trainers from around the world started to scope out her makeshift office and test her technique for themselves.

"They all came to us first, and they felt very comfortable that some of their athletes could definitely use the massage," Cipriani said.

The first wave of athletes began requesting massages Aug. 9, four days before the opening ceremonies, she said. "I had a lot of athletes from smaller countries that really never had massage before," Cipriani said. "They were so excited that they made appointments every single day. ... They were appreciative and curious about the work."

## The athletes arrive

One half-hour at a time, Cipriani said she massaged athletes such as Ukrainian sailor Olga Maslivets, Argentine field hockey player Lucas Camareri, Japanese sailor Masako Imai and Ugandan swimmer Edgar Luberenga.

"It was very interesting for me to work with different body types and different skin," Cipriani said. "They had some people there with darker skin. It was different massage technique, because with the darker skin color, it was very difficult to see the contours of the body landmark. I haven't worked with that kind of skin very much, so it was a learning process."

**"Everybody was really just cheering for everybody. It was not just being there to see the Italian team or the American team; it was really just a happy event."**

Simona Cipriani

While looking at a list of appointments, Cipriani was excited about meeting Michael Marchesano, who pitched for the Italian baseball team.

When she introduced herself, he began speaking English with surprising fluency. She soon realized that Marchesano, like many Olympic baseball players, was born in the United States.

Because different sports require athletes to use different muscle groups, the massage therapist had to adapt to specific needs.

"It was really challenging for me to go from one sport into the next, because you had a cyclist who really needed to focus on the lower extremities and then you had the swimmer right afterwards," Cipriani said. "Thirty minutes to me is very, very little. They're tremendous bodies, so it was a little hard to cover everybody and everything."

Despite alterations to technique, Cipriani said each unique massage was received the same way.

"I think they really needed that moment of quietness to be with themselves and with their own bodies," she said. "They had the time to concentrate and focus on their own body and have the moment for themselves and just enjoy the massage."

When she wasn't working, Cipriani collected and traded pins — an Olympic tradition — and joined crowds who watched early rounds of gymnastics and diving competitions.

"It was very sad to see a lot of empty seats," she said. "I don't know if people didn't go because they didn't feel safe or if (it was because) ticket prices were very high, (which) made it very hard



Aaron Houston/The Patent Trader

Simona Cipriani wears her Olympic Village pass, covered with pins given to her by athletes from around the world.

for the people who were there, the Athenians, to go to the events."

But everything else, from the events to the hospitality, inspired her. "As a spectator, I was very excited," she said. "Everybody was really just cheering for everybody. It was not just being there to see the Italian team or the American team; it was really just a happy event."

Cipriani's Olympic clients swelled in numbers before she prepared for her Aug. 16 flight home. A second group of massage therapists took the first group's place until the Aug. 29 closing ceremonies, she said. Her

bags a little heavier than when she arrived, Cipriani boarded a plane to New York.

## Sharing the worldview

Back in Mount Kisco, Cipriani keeps the collectors' pins in Art of Control, where clients ask about them and about the experience of working with some of the world's greatest athletes.

"My clients are all curious about what was the difference in working with athletes," Cipriani said. "I just felt that the athletes are so grounded; they're so human. They were so young and so adorable that I felt ... happy to serve them."

Anne Feldman, the executive director of the Mount Kisco Chamber of Commerce, said she was proud of Cipriani's behind-the-scenes contributions to the 28th Olympiad.

"I think it's very exciting that anybody from a small town would have the chance to participate in the Olympics," Feldman said. "It's a once-in-a-life-

time opportunity."

Or maybe twice. Cipriani, who emigrated from Rome 20 years ago, said she has applied to offer the same services when the winter games come to Torino in 2006.

"I'm not going to miss (out on) my home country," she said with a laugh.