Strong is the New Skinny

In the last ten years, millions of Americans, including Marsha Tieken and Adam Farrah, have come to live by this motto.

The two are the founders of the new concept on a healthier body image for society to embrace. Farrah is a kettlebell instructor as well as the author of “The Paleo Dieter’s Missing Link.” Tieken is a CrossFit instructor. Farrah and Tieken’s new way of thinking aids women in being comfortable with having a fit body and breaks down society’s perception of the perfect body. Most of society’s view has changed over the last 10 years, from thinking beautiful is thin to beautiful is fit.

“Strong is the new skinny is about women being strong and training hard,” Farrah said. “There’s nothing stopping us from tearing down outdated ideals.”

In the last ten years, millions of Americans, including Marsha Tieken and Adam Farrah, have come to live by this motto.

Joe Commisso, who co-owns CrossFit Dewitt in East Syracuse, said CrossFit is a broad fitness program designed for universal scalability.

Tieken believes that women can be strong and still feminine.

“When I hear the term, ‘strong is the new skinny,’” said Andrea Leonard, a CrossFitter. “I am filled with hope that the girls growing up today will never feel pressured to measure their worth based on what size jeans they wear.”

According to Commisso, CrossFit is highly beneficial to both men and women, but also helps women with their self-image. CrossFit’s training style minimizes the primary goal of working out to look good and it creates an emphasis on becoming fit and healthy.

“CrossFit is a strength and conditioning program that’s basis is training methodologies on constantly varied functional movements,” Commisso said. According to James Wagner of The Wall Street Journal, CrossFit was created in 1995, but it has recently become more popular over the past five years.

“I think CrossFit develops amazing bodies,” Commisso said, “however, our primary goal is not to look good in front of the mirror. We desire functional, strong and well-rounded individuals.”

According to Tieken, women were nervous about becoming too muscular because they thought it was unattractive.

“I don’t want muscles to be confused with CrossFit women,” Commisso said. “CrossFit women do not look like body builders, they look like athletes.”

Farrah said, this new way of thinking is that a muscular, fit body is the way we should think that a healthy body should look.
During a tabata workout, Andrea Leonard sumo high pulls 45 pounds. A tabata workout combines intervals of 20 seconds of concentrated work followed by 10 seconds of resting.

Andrea Leonard, a CrossFitter, runs laps with a 14-pound weighted ball during a workout, at CrossFit Dewitt, in East Syracuse, N.Y. "CrossFit helps me to take back me," she said.

"I like the implication that a strong, athletic body is a healthier body image than the 'heroin chic' look of the skinny print and runway models," said Mary Beth Vasiloff, a CrossFitter.

Vasiloff believes that body image is personal and should not be what society believes to be OK.

"Body image is how I perceive myself when I look in the mirror," Vasiloff said. "If I look in the mirror and I'm happy with what I see, then it doesn't matter what anyone says to me about how I 'should' look."

Leonard has advice for the young girls growing up now, and advice for her younger self.

"Your body is going to be with you for the rest of your life," Leonard said. "Feed it well, exercise often and take pride in the beauty of its accomplishments — it is an amazing machine."

CrossFit gyms and the paleolithic way of eating have helped form this concept. Paleolithic is the concept of eating meats, vegetables, fruits and nuts, which is known as the 'caveman diet.'

"I have many friends and know people at CrossFit," Tieken said, "that follow paleo and have great results in performance and with weight loss."

According to Farrah, a practical paleo diet is an effort to get back to foods we evolved on as a species. He says that an average American diet contains virtually nothing our bodies would actually recognize as food from our evolution.

"Our diet needs to be a living, breathing and evolving thing," Farrah said. "Paleo is more of a movement and a lifestyle than it is a "diet."

Farrah said society has an obligation to inspire future generations to create a better world, and old stereotypes need to be broken.

"Strong is the New Skinny is about increasing everyone’s awareness," Farrah said. "We as individuals, have a serious level of control over stereotypes and norms and what is accepted and what future generations see."

Since beginning CrossFit two years ago, Andrea Leonard has lost more than nine percent of her body fat. "My body since CrossFit has become a marvel to me," she said. "It performs like a machine, it’s capable, dependable, beautiful in both form and function."