



Rewiring Healthy Cooking at Home

*Ben Franklin-supported startup
is changing how health care
approaches culinary nutrition*

By Holly Riddle



Often, launching a successful business is possible only with the right combination of experience and support. Luckily for sisters and startup co-founders Olivia and Eva Weinstein, they have ample supplies of both, right here in Happy Valley, thanks to organizations such as Ben Franklin Technology Partners, Mount Nittany Health, and the YMCA of Centre County.

Olivia is a registered dietician and the director of nutrition innovation and implementation at Boston Medical Center. There, she and her team operate a rooftop garden, therapeutic food pantry, and teaching kitchen. Eva, meanwhile, has experience working in the medical devices industry. On both sides of their work, the two noticed some issues.

“In my work within teaching kitchens and teaching people healthy eating and cooking, there were a few obstacles we faced,” explains Olivia. “The first was scalability. We weren’t able to impact many patients at once. Classes were really small and limited. The second was practice. People would come to a three-part [class] series, but it didn’t always translate into behavior changes or offer enough practice to teach a person a skill. The third problem was cultural diversity. Classes didn’t always speak to the needs of different language speakers or people coming from different backgrounds or socioeconomic statuses.”

Through problems like these, Olivia could see firsthand how nutrition education resources didn’t always meet the needs of patients—which meant that patients couldn’t or didn’t always follow the nutrition recommendations of health care providers. However, together, the Weinstein sisters saw an opportunity for improvement, and Rewire Health was born.

Rewire Health, and its first product, the Pursuit app, helps health and wellness related organizations and companies better serve their patients or members by making culinary medicine more accessible.

“Culinary medicine is the practical application of nutrition science,” explains Olivia. “It’s teaching you the skills to follow a healthy

diet. Those skills can be something as simple as learning to microwave a meal, multitask [in the kitchen], or cook from scratch. We’re training home cooks to be able to prepare food that is both delicious and healthful.”

When patients use Rewire Health’s Pursuit app, they receive personalized recommendations and tools to help them build healthy habits in the kitchen that will, in turn, help them reach their health goals. While learning cooking skills, patients enjoy access to recipes and budget-friendly grocery lists. Recipes are based on the user’s skill level, ingredients the user may already have on hand, and other factors. The app’s highly personalized user experience can generate up to 50,000 variations of a single recipe.



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Patients aren’t the only ones benefitting from the Pursuit app, though. Businesses and organizations that partner with Rewire Health also see myriad benefits.

Eva says, “Whether it’s a hospital, health-related organization, or health and wellness company, there’s an incentive to want to



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engage your patients and members through educational content. ... That's typically in the form of ebooks or paper-based information, or just sending people to recipes online. We're changing that process to make the system more efficient for businesses, so they can save time and resources—and spend that time on more direct patient care.”

Olivia adds, “In health care, nutrition is important because it reduces health care costs. Patients who are malnourished or not eating appropriate diets are often the ones who use the ER or really expensive medical services. There’s been a lot of data that suggests nutrition interventions could help improve health care utilization.”

She also says that the current method of addressing nutrition concerns in a health care setting can be inadequate, with too-few nutrition coaches and dietitians, and patients only seeing those health care professionals on a limited schedule—not often enough to make

a real behavioral change. Even with teaching kitchen programs like what Olivia oversees at Boston Medical Center, programming isn’t always ideal for those who don’t have the time. On top of all this, nutrition education programs are often written for English speakers who eat a standard American diet, with little room for diversity.

Rewire Health aims to solve all this and more.

CRACKING THE CODE

Both sisters stress how they could not have built their business without Happy Valley resources.

Eva said, “These are people who believed in us before anything existed, and they’re still believing in us, even though things aren’t always moving as fast as we want them to. I don’t think we could have gotten as far as we have without this community of people.”

Olivia moved to State College shortly after the two began building their business,

and she was introduced to Ben Franklin Technology Partners and the organization's TechCelerator program, wherein entrepreneurial teams participate in a "business bootcamp" over ten weeks, before finally competing in a pitch contest. In 2021, the Weinsteins participated and took home the first-prize of \$7,500. In 2022, Rewire Health received further funding from Ben Franklin.

"Being female founders, fundraising is exceptionally difficult," says Eva. "It was really fantastic that Ben Franklin essentially took us under their wing, really early on, and believed in us and what we were doing."

John Siggins is a portfolio manager at Ben Franklin who's worked with Olivia and Eva over the last two years, helping them throughout the Ben Franklin funding process, alongside an entrepreneur-in-residence at Ben Franklin, Michael Wahlster, who provides the two with mentoring as they navigate the entrepreneurial world.

Siggins says a few key things made him want to work with the Weinstein sisters and support Rewire Health: Olivia's day-to-day experience as a dietician faced with the challenges presented by patients with diet-related medical issues; the sisters' vision to develop a platform that would supplement what a dietician could do on an ongoing basis; and Eva's aggressive commitment to making the platform and business opportunity work.

"They were a great fit for us," he sums up.

Wahlster says something similar, noting, "Everything they were doing was really interesting. Plus, I'm a vegan so diet is important [to me]. It all clicked. ... The planets aligned and I really wanted to work with the company."

Wahlster further expanded on the need he sees for Rewire Health. While many of the Pursuit app's individual components aren't necessarily new on their own, like the meal planning suggestions or substitutes, he says



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when you combine those elements with an AI-powered database and the Weinsteins' medical experience, it allows app users "to really crack the code."

He says, "It's really hard. Someone goes to the store and they have diabetes. They know generally the things they should and shouldn't be eating, but when they're in the supermarket or corner grocery store, making those decisions is difficult. Even more difficult is when



The partnership with YMCA of Centre County is an excellent example of Mount Nittany Health's mission of 'healthier people, stronger community.' We know that the strength of a community is directly affected by the health of the people in it, and we want to do all we can to get resources, education, and programs into the community.

you get home and now it's time to prepare a meal. You're really trying hard to stick to a diet and you realize you either don't know how to make something or you're missing two or three ingredients. ... That's where all this comes together. It's a pretty powerful platform."

Around the time the Weinstens graduated from the Ben Franklin TechCelerator program, Eva left her job and dedicated herself to Rewire Health full-time. The business began to garner interest from hospitals and community partners, enabling them to form a pilot program.

One of the most recent Rewire Health pilot programs took place earlier this year, thanks to a Mount Nittany Health sponsorship. The YMCA of Centre County's Healthy Habits Program was an eight-week program that combined in-person activities with the YMCA's Anti-Hunger Program while giving participants access to the Pursuit app. Currently, the Weinstens are planning a broader rollout of the Pursuit app for YMCA members, allowing beneficiaries at YMCA food distribution sites to use the app with recipes and suggestions specifically tailored to the foods received.

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Monica Montag
MA, HHP, CN,
Founder & Sr. Nutritionist



Laura Kelly
MA, MSACN, LDN, CNS



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MS, CN



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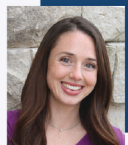
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MS, CNS



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Glenn Eckenrode participated in the Rewire Health pilot program.



Left to right: Eva and Olivia Weinstein

stronger community,” says Susan Trainor, Mount Nittany Physician Group Division of Endocrinology and chair of the YMCA State College Branch Advisory Committee.

She adds, “We know that the strength of a community is directly affected by the health of the people in it, and we want to do all we can, both inside our medical offices and beyond, to get resources, education, and programs into the community. This includes having a presence in places where people wouldn’t expect to find a Mount Nittany Health program. The YMCA is one such example; it has also served the community for decades and we know that this partnership helps people live healthier lives.”

Today, the Rewire Health team is made up of not just the Weinsteins, but also talent they’ve met along their journey thus far, including Andrew Male, the company’s chief technology officer, whom the Weinsteins met through Ben Franklin, and Patricia Moore, community and partnerships lead, whom they met through the YMCA pilot program.

MAKING THE WORLD EASIER AND MORE ENJOYABLE

As much as Olivia and Eva relied on community support to launch and build Rewire Health, though, they also relied on one another.

“Starting a company with your sister adds another level of resilience,” explains Olivia. “You don’t want your sister to fail. I want to succeed as much as I want Eva to succeed. That adds another level of responsibility and motivation to keep going.”

Looking to the future, the two have their sights set on health applications that go beyond nutrition, with an overarching focus on health education in general.

Olivia notes, “We’re both super-passionate about finding innovative ways to make life easier for people. Right now, that’s through nutrition, but I think we’ll always be inventing ways to make the world easier and more enjoyable for people from all backgrounds.” **T&G**

Holly Riddle is a freelance writer who covers business and lifestyle in Centre County.