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ROUND THE RANCHO: Yoga studio comes to RSM

Yoga studio moves into Plaza Antonio.

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Times have changed! In lots of ways, of course. But especially in the way we perceive our physical well-being.

For women, the emphasis used to be on fitting into the smallest size possible. For men it was demonstrating physical prowess. But in recent decades we've been learning that physical fitness isn't just about bench-pressing "x" number of pounds, but about being active and flexible and comfortable within one's skin.

The foundation for this wellness? Connecting physical health with one's mental, emotional and even spiritual well-being.

Recently I asked Rancho resident Lisa Brabender, owner of the newly opened Lotus 7 Yoga and Pilates at the Antonio Plaza shopping center, for her own take on fitness and what brought her to the physical and meditative discipline known as yoga.

"My first introduction to yoga was in my college dormitory 25 years ago," Lisa told me. "Our staff resident was a practitioner and offered to gather together a few nights a week and practice with a few of us students in the common living room. I had been a runner since high school and at the time was suffering from shin splints and painful Achilles heels. I thought I would give it a try and see if it could help with my training. Within one week of practicing specific poses for these problem areas, my pain had reduced considerably."

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in social science, Lisa went on to earn a master's degree in business administration. She also married, moved to Rancho Santa Margarita and started a family. "My husband and I fell in love with Rancho from the moment we crossed over Trabuco Canyon 20 years ago, while hiking in Silverado Canyon," she said.

During this time Lisa also developed a career as a sales and operations executive at Bristol Park Medical Group, Global Van Lines, and Federal Express Ground. With all of this activity, however, something had to give, and gradually she let go of her regular yoga and running routines.

Finally, about three years ago "I woke up, looked at myself in the mirror and didn't recognize the woman staring back at herself," she said. "I was 75 pounds heavier than I was in college, my skin was broken out with acne and my hair was falling out in clumps in the sink."

A return to running seemed the answer. "But as luck would have it," she said, "I injured myself within a month. A friend of mine suggested that I try yoga while my tendons were healing." She did so, and lost 55 pounds. Her complexion also cleared up and her hair stopped falling out.

The restorative powers of yoga, in fact, prompted Lisa to consider opening a studio in Rancho. In time she found a location: An upstairs suite at Plaza Antonio shopping center adjacent the picturesque arched

entryway off Alma Aldea.

In addition to yoga classes with certified instructors, Lisa also decided to offer Pilates (named after its developer, Joseph Pilates). She describes it as "a system of movement and strengthening that promotes full breath, healthy joint articulation and stability in the core muscles of the body."

"Our goal is to provide the Saddleback Valley community a warm, safe place to learn and experience the wonderful self-discipline of yoga and Pilates in which students of all levels can practice and help each other in bettering their body, mind and spirit," Lisa said.

Lotus 7 is upstairs from H&R Block in Plaza Antonio, 22411 Antonio Parkway, Suite C-215. Information: 949-888-4503 or www.lotus7yoga.com .

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