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## Young and old invited to participate in two ancient arts

Hello, and welcome to "repARTee," a column encompassing the arts in Punta Gorda.

Webster's Dictionary defines art as a skill acquired by experience, study or observation and the conscious use of skill and creative imagination. The first kind of art that comes to mind includes two- or three-dimensional creations such as paintings, watercolors, sculptures and the like. However, physicality also can be classified as art; two such examples are the ancient arts of Oriental, or belly, dancing and the practice of yoga. Skill in both is acquired through study and observation and the conscious application of the skills learned.

Over the years, there has been the notion that belly dancing was a racy "hootchie-cootchie" dance practiced by less than proper ladies. Legend has it the misconception originated at the 1893 Columbian Exposition held in Chicago, Ill. A promoter reportedly coined the term "belly dance" to encourage attendance at an exhibit where a dancer named Little Egypt performed nontraditional dances to nontraditional music, including a song entitled Snake Dance that was written by the promoter to draw a crowd and sell tickets. One can only imagine how horrified strait-laced Victorian ladies were when they saw performances by Little Egypt.

According to Juanita Whitaker, a belly dance instructor who conducts drop-in classes at the Punta Gorda Woman's Club, the ancient art of Oriental dance celebrates the female gender with three distinct styles of dancing: Asian/Oriental, Egyptian and Turkish. Different attire and accessories are used by the dancers for each particular dance style.

Several weeks ago, I attended the free belly dancing class at the Punta Gorda Woman's Club just to see what it was like. The class was originally offered as a Think Thursday initiative, but it became popular enough to be scheduled from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. every Monday. For \$5 per session, residents and visitors can learn an ancient art. It's a fun class and a great fitness workout.

For more information, call Whitaker at 859-230-0235.

The practice of yoga is not only an art, it also is a science, according to Bonnie Yonker, owner of Punta Gorda's The Yoga Sanctuary. Yoga's main purpose is to quiet the mind. While yoga is not a religion, practicing yoga brings to those who practice it a spiritual discipline not usually encountered in our rushed, day-to-day lives. Unlike strenuous physical exercise, yoga is accessible to anyone, and can be tailored to address a student's flexibility limitations or even their age.

Yonker said, "Yoga and meditation combined with specific breathing techniques create an awareness of both mind and body. The breathing techniques become the tools used to clear the mind and make the practitioner more aware of their inner being. We are all connected, and we share the same energy. Spiritually, we are all the same in our hearts, and those who practice yoga project an inner peacefulness that is projected outwardly to others."

The benefits of yoga to one's inner being are matched by benefits to the body through increased strength and flexibility and improved balance. All major systems in the body, including the nervous system, are stimulated by various physical postures, called asanas. The practice of yoga promotes stress release and improves focus and concentration.

The Yoga Sanctuary offers a wide variety of classes, as well as individual instruction, in the art of yoga.

Yonker said yoga can become a lifelong practice, and she encourages children to study it because it teaches them how to focus their energy and encourages better concentration, which can lead to better performance in school. They are also inspired to create, and students will complete an art project in every session.

Yonker has practiced yoga for the past 16 years and is a certified teacher. When I asked her what she believes is the biggest benefit of practicing yoga, she said, "It makes the student feel physically good, which has a positive effect on their mind and thoughts."

The Yoga Sanctuary is located in the Swiss Connections Building, 403 Sullivan St. For information about the current classes or private instruction, visit [www.theyoga-sanctuary.biz](http://www.theyoga-sanctuary.biz) or call 941-505-9642.

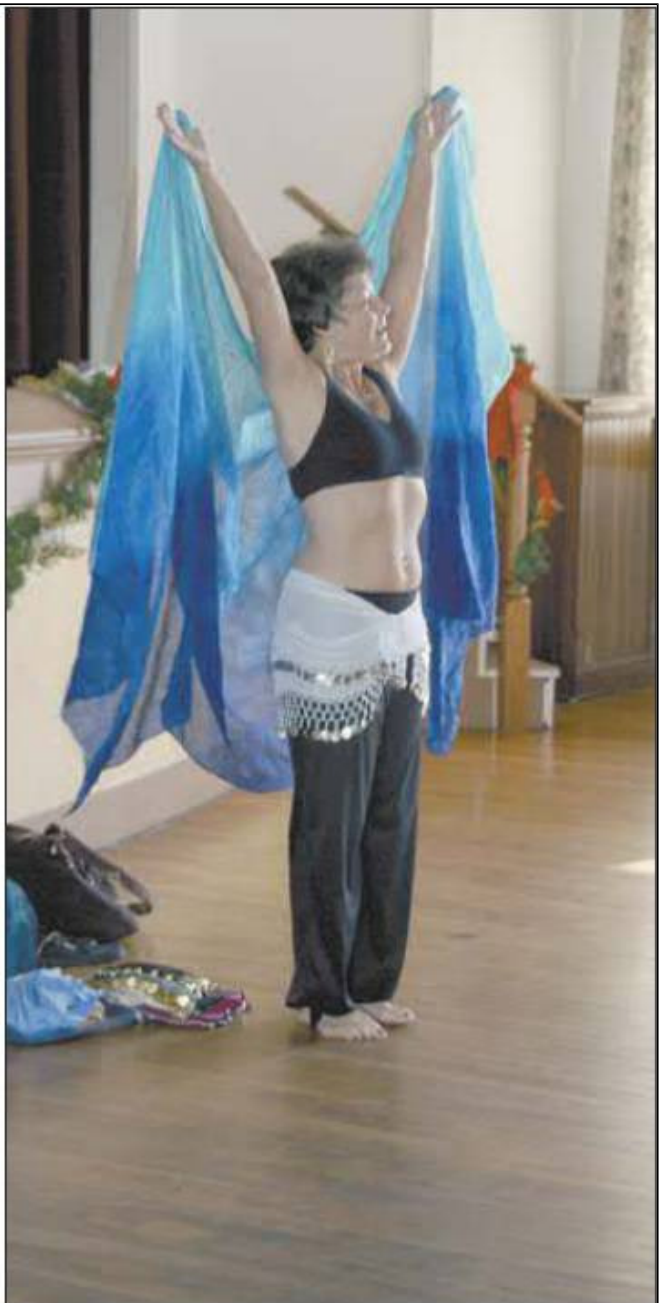
Until next time, remember, art is good for the soul; indulge yourself.

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Ruth Spies



Belly dance instructor Juanita Whitaker demonstrates dance moves for the class.



Owner Bonnie Yonker assists Susan Wyllie with a yoga posture.



**PHOTO PROVIDED BY BONNIE YONKER** Students participate in a group posture during a yoga class at The Yoga Sanctuary.



Sharon Fultz, Lisa Greco and Susan Wyllie, students at The Yoga Sanctuary, demonstrate an asana, or yoga posture, Warrior II. In addition to studying yoga, Sharon Fultz teaches Tai Chi at The Yoga Sanctuary.



**HERALD PHOTOS BY RUTH SPIES** Drop in students, front row, from left, Bonnie Brumfield, Liz Berry, Carol Pearce, Doris Benko and Gillian Roth.