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## Messages of peace, going green

By ERIN BROEMEL SUN CORRESPONDENT

PUNTA GORDA — Most people go to work and enjoy a stressful hectic day of phones ringing off the hook and angry customers beating down the door. For Bonnie Yonker, however, work is about peace, rest and relaxation.

After all, that's the whole point of her business — she owns and operates The Yoga Sanctuary, located at 403 Sullivan St.

Yonker hasn't always been a yoga guru. She began her career as a CPA, auditing at a firm. She began to study yoga seriously 16 years ago in New York after a twoweek trip to Nepal. She stumbled upon the concept while in college, but it was after her trip that she truly embraced the yoga lifestyle.

"That was a silent period in my life," Yonker said. "I was able to reflect over things and find myself."

She found a teacher in Yogiraj Alan Finger, who helped her become a certified yoga instructor.

Born and raised in New York, Yonker relocated to Punta Gorda in 2003 at the request of her husband, a former Naples native.

"It is completely different here," Yonker said. "I love the sense of community that Punta Gorda has." Yonker opened The Yoga Sanctuary in May 2007, and she has developed a large following. It was her dream since relocating to the area.

Prior to her studio, Yonker would teach yoga wherever she could find a home — at salons, health clubs and houses. Now, with her studio, she can reach out to more of the community and share her love of yoga.

Her classes range from beginner to expert and encompass all levels of physical fitness. Yonker stresses that anyone can do yoga, despite flexibility and age. The average age of her students is 60, with the exception of her children's class, which starts at age 6.

"My mission is to reach out to the average person," Yonker said, "and dispel the notion that yoga is only for the super fit and flexible."

The Yoga Sanctuary is home to four yoga instructors, one of which specializes in children's yoga. There is also a tai chi instructor who holds classes weekly.

To Yonker, yoga is a lifestyle that she embraces. It focuses on peace and understanding in one's self. She tries to convey that message to everyone she meets. Her students look to her for her calming manner and friendly attitude.

Yonker created her studio to be a sanctuary for herself and her students. She utilized organic materials wherever possible, from the cork floor to the organic paint on the walls. It helps her and her students stay connected to the Earth.

An avid environmentalist, Yonker strives to keep her studio as environmentally friendly as possible. Even the clothing and accessories she stocks in her little storefront are chosen with the environment in mind. She frequently lectures on going "green" and saving the environment. This year, for the second year in a row, she is hosting Earth Day on April 22 in Lashley Park. She is focusing this year's theme on 10 ways to go green every day.

"I try to do what I can for the Earth," Yonker said. "It's so important for us to try and educate people on what

they can do for the environment, no matter how small.”

For more information about The Yoga Sanctuary or the Earth Day celebration, call 941-505-YOGA (9642) or e-mail [info@theyogasanctuary.biz](mailto:info@theyogasanctuary.biz).



**SUN PHOTO BY ERIN BROEMEL** Yoga instructor Bonnie Yonker promotes health, peace and understanding in front of her store’s organic clothing selections at The Yoga Sanctuary in Punta Gorda.

