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## Bonnie Yonker shares her love and passion for yoga

Yoga practiced in the West today stems for the most part from the Yoga Sutras, which were written circa 200 A.D. by Patanjali and are considered the classical description of yoga. Patanjali's text is looked upon as one of the six darshanas, or branches, of traditional Indian philosophy. In the text, Patanjali describes an integral part of living called Raja Yoga, which includes as one of its parts a series of physical postures called asanas.

In the West, yoga is generally taken to mean the practice of the asanas, which, in addition to giving a sense of well being, were also meant to prepare the body to sit for long hours in meditation and contemplation.

The spread of yoga in the West can be partly attributed to such spiritual figures as Swami Vivekanda and Paramhansa Yogananda, who first awakened the interest of Western seekers of Eastern philosophies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. T. Krishnamacharya and his students, B.K.S. Iyengar and T.K.V. Desikachar, have an intense influence on yoga as it is practiced today.

The physical asanas of Hatha Yoga found popularity with people in the West who were seeking physical and emotional balance rather than full-fledged enlightenment, and many styles have evolved as individual teachers stress different facets of the practice.

T.K.V. Desikachar, author of "The Heart of Yoga," writes, "Books or classes often give the impression that there are prerequisites for the study of yoga — we begin where we are and how we are, and what we are, and whatever happens, happens. So let us not forget, we can begin practicing yoga from any point."

Bonnie Yonker, founder of The Yoga Sanctuary, makes this very point as she talks about her new studio at 403 Sullivan St., Punta Gorda. Bonnie, originally from New York and Staten Island, was at one time a CPA in the restaurant industry. At the same time, her other self traveled in Nepal and tackled Mount Everest. In 1993, she was introduced to yoga and studied it informally for several years.

In 2003, Bonnie successfully completed the intensive Be Yoga ISHTA teacher training in New York City under renowned yogiraj Alan Finger.

Opening the Yoga Sanctuary is a way of sharing her love and passion for yoga with the community. She also continues to be a student of the art, being most inspired by the teachings of among others, Tias Little, Rod Stryker, Mark Whitwell and Finger.

"The Yoga Sanctuary has been created," said Bonnie, "to provide a moment of tranquility in our busy lives." At the studio, Bonnie offers a full range of yoga classes:

- Level 1 — Emphasizes strength, flexibility and balance, where beginning students can learn the foundations of a yoga practice, and experienced students are challenged to explore the fundamentals of their practice.
  - Level 2 — Six months of yoga are suggested for this class.
- Open Level — Recommended for all levels. Gentle Yoga. A class for those who wish to move at a slower pace.
  - Sunrise Yoga — A class that begins at 7 a.m. and gets a jump on the day. "This class will leave you calm and energized," said Bonnie.
- Express Yoga — A-45 minute all-level class.

The Yoga Sanctuary carries its message of nonviolence (ahimsa) and environmental consciousness to the ambience of its studio and the very fabric of its chairs and flooring. The studio flooring is created from cork, warm and soft to the feet as well as a safe environment for the practice of yoga. The chairs in the foyer repeat the ambience and environmental statement. Here, merchandise such as yoga mats is available for those participating in yoga classes.

Bonnie offers a variety of options — private sessions, single class rates, class cards, and membership rates. Gift cards are also offered. If you are new to yoga, there are many opportunities for the beginner, such as a free orientation, an introduction to a yoga series, private sessions and gentle classes.

Anyone, regardless of age or flexibility, can practice yoga.

“Just bring an open mind,” Bonnie said. For more information about this new business, explore [www.theyoga-sanctuary.biz](http://www.theyoga-sanctuary.biz).

Bonnie Yonker, The Yoga Sanctuary, 403 Sullivan St., Punta Gorda, 941-505-YOGA (9642).

Contact The Voice of Downtown with news of your business at [jas4@comcast.net](mailto:jas4@comcast.net).



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Bonnie Yonker's new business, The Yoga Sanctuary, is in the Swiss Connection building at Sullivan Street and West Virginia Avenue.