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The Yoga Sanctuary celebrates first anniversary

By **DAWN KREBS FEELING FIT EDITOR**

As The Yoga Sanctuary finishes its first year of operation in Punta Gorda, owner and director of the facility, Bonnie Yonker, was able to talk a little about the year she's had.

According to Yonker, The Yoga Sanctuary opened its doors in May 2007 with an excited group of new students. "In our first year, we have more than tripled the number of students attending classes, workshops, and private instruction at the studio," Yonker said.

The business has been very well received in the community, with students traveling from Ft. Myers to Englewood. It also carries a full retail line of yoga clothing, props, and accessories.

"We sell only organic, locally produced, or fair trade items, and that is important to our customers," Yonker said.

Yonker moved to Punta Gorda from New York City in 2003, and followed her passion of yoga to start a new business.

"I wanted to find a way to share the many benefits of yoga with the entire community," she explained. "People are often intimidated by yoga because they don't really know what it is, or have an image of someone twisted into a pretzel. We wanted to show that the benefits of yoga can be felt by anyone. Our mission is to provide a warm, safe environment where students can nurture their mind, body, and spirit. Punta Gorda is an ideal place from which to share this passion. The complementary businesses and growing energy of downtown provide a welcoming environment for our students.

Currently, the business has four instructors at the studio, all extremely well qualified with at least 15 years experience of studying and teaching yoga. Yonker doesn't see the interest in yoga waning anytime soon.

"As western medicine is starting to validate the time-proven benefits of yoga, we are seeing more doctors, physical therapists, and psychologists not only referring their patients to yoga, but coming to class themselves. This assimilation of yoga into everyday medical practice will continue to bring its benefits to a larger and larger audience."

Yonker goes on to state that the Level I classes are the most popular at the moment.

"The class appeals to a wide spectrum of students. Beginning students get to learn the basics in a comfortable setting, and more experienced students are challenged to go deeper into the fundamentals of the practice."

Yonker offers some advice for those who have never tried it before.

"Yoga is unimimidating and made for each individual to practice at their own level, their own pace. Our students range in age from three years to 93-years-old, from athletes to those recovering from heart surgery. All you ever need to bring is yourself. We have props, mats, and anything else that you may need.

The Yoga Sanctuary is located at 403 Sullivan Street in downtown Punta Gorda and can be reached at 941-505-9642, or visit the Web site at www.theyogasanctuary.biz.



Photo provided by Bonne Yonker The staff of the Yoga Sanctuary celebrates its first anniversary. In the back row: Adrienne Butwell and Cody McClymont. In the front row: Gwen Burdick, Bonnie Yonker and Jennifer Arnold.