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## Yoga classes are good for your mind, body and spirit

Beware the hip flexors. I didn't even know I had hip flexors until I let The Yoga Sanctuary owner Bonnie Yonker talk me into going to her first Yoga for Cyclists workshop last Sunday morning.

I normally veg out on Sunday mornings, but her studio in the Swiss Connections building (403 Sullivan St.) is just down the street from my office and I was an easy target.

Now, two days after the class, as I'm writing this, I know where my hip flexor muscles are because they're communicating with me. They still hurt a little as a result of my overdoing the yoga postures intended to improve their strength and flexibility.

I guess this pain means the thousands of miles of circular, repetitive, limited-range-of-motion pedaling weren't good for my hip flexors, which are buried deep in the hips and help keep them in place.

A bunch of other cyclists showed up for a class that Yonker said first occurred to her during an AIDS ride while she was living in New York and was just taking yoga classes instead of teaching them.

"During the ride, I'd watch people when they got off their bikes, and they were hurting," she said. "Based on my own experiences with cycling and yoga, I was just doing my own yoga practice, my girlfriend and I, and it helped. That evening, people asked if they could join in. By the fourth day, I was leading 25 cyclists."

The rest, as the old saw goes, is history. She went on to become a certified instructor and, after opening The Yoga Sanctuary in May of 2007, began to think about putting together her inaugural class for cyclists.

During an anatomy discussion at the start of the class, we found out our hip flexors are compressed during pedaling and sitting on our bikes. Cycling doesn't do much for your hamstrings, either. Both are critical for successful, painfree cycling.

Then the class began working on postures designed to balance the body, strengthen the parts that aren't used and bring better flexibility to hip and legs.

The postures (don't call them exercises) we went through had evil-sounding names like the cobra and the lunge, and they stretched parts of my body I didn't know I had. I think it was overdoing the lunge, which you can see demonstrated by Patrick Cramer in the photo on this page, that got my flexors.

Bonnie assured us that indulging in a regular program of these postures would make us better cyclists, and I have no doubt she knows what she is talking about. After the class, the vertebrae in my back were making those little popping sounds that let me know they're nice and loose, and I felt a sense of energy and an eagerness to take on a century bike ride (at least until the old flexors started complaining a few hours later).

I wasn't the only participant who had that raring-to-go reaction to the hour and a half of work on long-neglected muscle groups.

Charlotte Regional Medical Center CEO Brad Nurkin, who's been going to yoga classes for a couple of months and was on the mat next to me, told me on Wednesday, "My quads hurt afterwards, but it was a good soreness. I felt better for having done it and much better after the soreness went away."

That's the usual reaction to a yoga class, according to Yonker.

"Most people come for the physical part," she said. "From there, they get into the spiritual aspect. I think both are important. Yoga is a full experience — mind, body and spirit."

Yonker's yoga classes have been well received, and she has no doubt she has chosen the right time and place for her calling.

"Yoga is thriving everywhere," she said. "In New York City, there's a studio on every corner. I think it fits really well here. It's a trend because the baby boomer generation (not too many of them in Punta Gorda, are there?) is seeking natural ways to stay healthier and live longer."

Yonker is considering adding classes for other sports, with tennis the one most on her mind. I know I could use one that helps a golf swing, which requires a combination of strength, flexibility, and, yes, inner peace. Yonker said one thing about yoga that still sticks in my mind today — "People think it looks easy, but it isn't." This people doesn't think that anymore. For more information about yoga classes, you can call The Yoga Sanctuary at 941-505-YOGA (9642).

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**HERALD PHOTOS BY GORDON BOWER, [pgherald@sun-herald.com](mailto:pgherald@sun-herald.com)** Marietta Mason listens closely to yoga instructor Bonnie Yonker's discussion of the leg muscles used in cycling.



Proper form is critical to a yoga posture, and Yonker makes an adjustment to Mary Sprenulli's cobra posture, above, later demonstrated successfully by both her and her classmate, Renee Burton.



Above, Yonker makes an adjustment to Renee Burton's form in this hamstring posture, but she's not the yogi (yoga slang for an enthusiast) in this group? Marietta Mason, front, an avid yoga practitioner, has hamstrings that allow her to go past vertical in this posture. Don't try this at home



Right, Patrick Cramer, who manages the Acme Bicycle Shop, demonstrates the lunge.

