

Becoming free: Yoga classes not your typical exercise

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NILES — “We are not practicing yoga to take the edge off, or to loosen up, or to get in shape. We practice yoga to become free,” said Greta Hurst as she began her yoga class at Fernwood Botanical Garden last week.

Hurst, a certified yoga instructor, has been teaching yoga classes

each week at Fernwood since she earned her certification in May of 2013. She had been practicing yoga for about 12 years prior to graduating from Solace Yoga Studio in Mishawaka, Ind.

Offered in 8-week sessions, the yoga classes at Fernwood run year-round, with the spring session just starting.

“Most people sign up for 8 weeks, but walk-ins are welcome, too,” Hurst pointed out. “I have a lot of people who just show up for the first time. There’s no commitment, and I teach all levels in each class.”

Although the classes are held indoors during the colder months, the summer yoga classes will be held outdoors in various locations on the grounds of Fernwood.

“In the summer, we go outside. That’s the big attraction for yoga at Fernwood,” Hurst said. “Weather always plays into my choice of locations. The heart garden is my favorite place there. We practice yoga under a big pine tree.”

Classes meet on Thursdays from 12:15 to 1:30 p.m., and the cost to attend is \$8 for Fernwood members and \$10 for nonmembers. Students only need to bring appropriate clothing and an open mind. Mats and all of the props, including blocks and straps, are provided.

“Using the props is about experiencing the full expression of the position,” Hurst explained.

There are many styles of yoga, but Hurst has chosen the Hatha style yoga. According to her website, the goal is to “balance the mind and body via physical postures or ‘asanas,’ purification practices, controlled breathing, and the calming of the mind through relaxation and meditation.”

The name of her company, “Santosh Yoga for Life,” emphasizes the meaning of the Sanskrit word for “contentment,” or “wanting what you have.”



Greta Hurst teaches yoga classes at Fernwood throughout the year on Thursdays. She likes to hold her yoga classes in different locations on the grounds of Fernwood when the weather permits. (Photo submitted by William Hurst)

“What makes me unique is that I follow the Eight Limb Path of yoga. I do try to incorporate it in my class in a very subtle way,” Hurst explained. “ I talk about values, about the way students view their values and the way they view the world.”

Therefore, Hurst’s yoga classes incorporate a number of different elements that may not be present in every yoga class.

“I have a unique meditation, breath work and sequence of postures for every class. They are not unique to me, but it’s my selection, my orchestration of them if you will, that is unique,” Hurst said. “I have several resources that I use.”

While many people cannot attend the Fernwood yoga class due to their afternoon obligations, Hurst also offers some evening classes at her yoga studio in Tabula Rasa Gallery, located at 8918 First St. in Baroda. Hurst and her husband Bill have owned the gallery since 2010. A full schedule of their classes can be found at www.santoshayogaforlife.com.

“The classes at Tabula Rasa are similar to the Fernwood class,” Hurst said. “Wednesday morning classes are slightly more energetic, and Thursday nights are slightly more gentle because that class is for beginners.”

Certified yoga instructor and massage therapist Sarah Ashen also teaches a monthly yoga class at Tabula Rasa.

Hurst explained how the practice of yoga is connected to the appreciation of nature.

“‘Yoga’ means ‘to yoke the breath, mind and spirit.’ Out in nature, it’s all about using the senses,” Hurst said. “If you practice mindfulness in yoga, you’ll be better able to experience and be present in nature.”

Hurst also noted that practicing yoga can enhance one’s ability to enjoy outdoor activities.

“As you increase your oxygenation, you’ll be better able to experience nature,” Hurst said. “And, in any sport, you need flexibility so that if you do fall, for example, you won’t hurt yourself.”

While the cold weather still makes it difficult to get out to enjoy many outdoor activities, practicing yoga at Fernwood or at Tabula Rasa can help prepare one to enjoy those activities more fully once the weather turns warmer. In addition, practicing yoga can help us all endure what is starting to seem like an usually long winter.

“Practicing yoga brings me calmness, but it also empowers me,” Hurst explained. “It is the bridge between my body and my spirituality.”

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