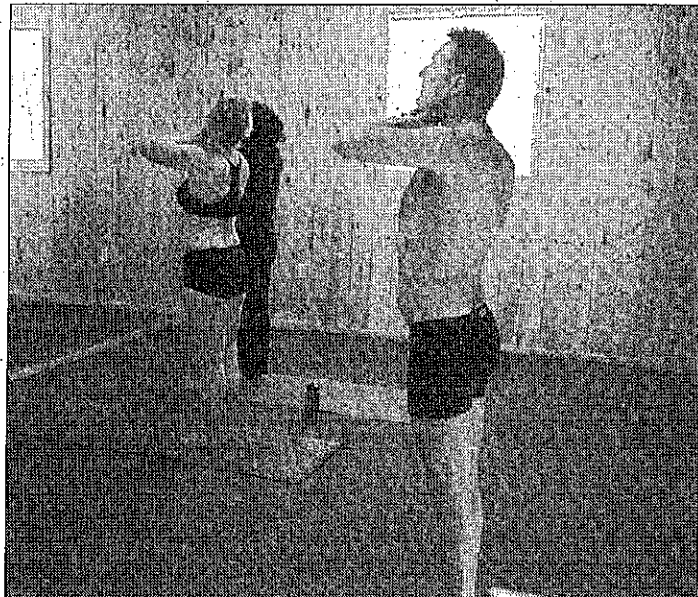


LOCAL NEWS

Hot Yoga studio opens in Millbrook



ZEN: Couple Kelli P. Harrington and Michael S. Bittner (left) greet new students at the entrance to ZenSpot; one of the few hot yoga providers in the county. Michael S. Bittner leads students in a hot yoga workout in Millbrook. Temperatures inside the studio are kept between 100 and 104 degrees, and humidity levels are raised. The purpose of hot yoga is to facilitate the stretching of the muscles and the release of toxins from the body. (Photos by Janine Stankus)

By Janine Stankus
Staff Reporter

The Stable at Millbrook, located at 371 South Rd., has become a literal hot spot for yoga practitioners in the area. Couple Michael S. Bittner and Kelli P. Harrington opened ZenSpot on Oct. 29 of 2008, a "hot yoga" studio, built within an unutilized horse stable on their property.

According to the couple, ZenSpot is only one of four hot yoga studios in the tri-county area. "We would travel quite a distance," said Harrington, who would drive to either Westchester or Connecticut to practice hot yoga in the past. "It could actually be a four or five hour day," noting the amount of time it takes to make the hour long trip, practice for 90 minutes, shower, and then return.

Hot yoga is a 1,000 year old brand of yoga that focuses on cleansing and detoxifying the body. "What's different about it," said Harrington, "is that it works the body from the inside out." The form attempts to recreate the conditions in India, where the practice originated. The ZenSpot studio is kept at a temperature between 100 and 104 degrees, with

humidifiers spewing moisture into the air, creating an elevated heat index. The purpose of hot yoga is to initiate the natural release of toxins from the body. The heat also facilitates the stretching of the muscles. Maintaining flexibility is important, especially as one ages, in preventing and healing injuries. Both Bittner and Harrington said that practicing yoga has helped them to recover from various sports injuries that they sustained in the past.

At ZenSpot, the hot yoga classes attract a range of customers from all over the Hudson Valley. The couple also noted that their clientele is comprised of a good mix of men and women, unusual in yoga, which is generally female-dominated. The ratio, said Harrington, could almost be considered equal.

Their students also represent a variety of age groups--from teens to seniors. The couple spoke of one 68-year-old regular who has achieved remarkable flexibility through practicing hot yoga. The exercise, commented Bittner, "continues to grow with you" and helps to keep both mind and body young and refreshed. You reclaim that lost youth

and beauty that you once had," he said.

Yoga presents a unique combination of physical and emotional challenges, focusing simultaneously on mind, body, and spirit. "It's the most comprehensive workout you can get," said Bittner. Yoga may be used to either complement or completely replace one's regular gym workout. "It will improve your posture and breathing, two things that are very important at the gym," said Bittner. "It will help compensate for the things you miss."

Harrington's interest in yoga began long before her husband's, who initially stuck with his gym workouts. "One day," said Harrington, "he called me up and said, 'You're never going to believe what I did!'" Bittner was hooked, and eventually yoga became the source of his regimented exercise.

Hot yoga, said Harrington, is even good for people looking to lose weight. The postures, which were designed according to the systems of the body, help stabilize metabolism and limit food cravings. "Neither of us has eaten anything greasy in years," said Harrington, noting that yoga

helps one to eliminate desires for that which is harmful to the body. "It's sort of like an organic, natural diet," she said.

Classes are held at ZenSpot seven days a week. On Mondays and Wednesdays, a 60 minutes class is conducted from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., a 90 minute class from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m., and another 60 minute class between 7:30 and 8:30. On Tuesdays and Thursdays classes are held between 9:30 a.m. and 11 a.m., 5:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m., and 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Friday classes take place between 9:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. as well as 5:30 to 7 p.m. Saturday and Sunday classes are held between 8:30 a.m. and 10 a.m., and 10:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.

Drop-ins are \$20, student drop-ins are \$15, a five-visit pass is \$85, a 10-visit pass is \$180, a 20-visit pass is \$340, and a monthly unlimited pass is \$160.

The studio also offers a special one week pass for new students at a cost of \$30.

Classes are introductory across the board, so that people of all skill levels may participate.