

Pilates expert stresses purity of basics

By Patricia Bathurst
SPECIAL FOR THE ABG

Forty years ago, only professional dancers — and some prizefighters — had heard of Pilates.

When Virginia Nicholas began teaching Pilates classes in Tempe nearly 15 years ago, not even many fitness fanatics knew about it. Today, though, an estimated 5 million people nationwide practice Pilates.

Pilates, developed by Joseph Pilates early in the 20th century, is a non-impact form of exercise that aims to improve strength, flexibility, posture, coordination and body tone.

Exercises rely on breathing, focused muscle coordination and movement, especially the body's core abdominal area, and look a lot like yoga postures in action. Slow, controlled movements stretch and strengthen muscle groups with the aim of achieving a balanced body and an awareness of posture.

"I was dancing with Bill Evans (Dance Company, a modern-dance troupe) and one of my fellow dancers took me to a Pilates class," Nicholas said. "After (I began taking Pilates classes), everything was easier: rehearsals, steps, turns that had been difficult. ... It was all easier.

"Pilates kept us in shape



CHERYL EVANS/ARIZONA BUSINESS GAZETTE

Virginia Nicholas, a certified Pilates Core Integration instructor, helps Kailey Johnson, an instructor trainee, with her form. The two were working out recently at Nicholas' Tempe studio.

from the inside-out and kept us from injuries in dancing. I could even do triple turns without effort, and I really became a believer."

Nicholas was teaching dance when a student who had recently had knee surgery asked if there were any exercises that might help her regain movement and strength.

"I showed her some Pilates exercises, and then another student who had a back problem noticed how much improved the other student was and asked for some exercises. Before you know it, I had 30 stu-

dents learning Pilates."

She began slowly, investing in one piece of Pilates-related equipment at a time while opening Moving Breath Studio with one exercise suite.

Today, there are enough pieces of equipment for as many as eight students at any one time. There also is enough room for group classes with well over a dozen participants, although most classes and lessons at Moving Breath top out at about four.

"It's a small, personal studio," Nicholas said, "and people get a lot of personal attention.

You're never in a class with 20 other people."

Classes range from private instruction to small group sessions. Nicholas also offers a class in floor barre, which combines modern/ballet dance movements with strength and flexibility exercises.

She has produced a series of DVDs that detail a range of Pilates exercises, including one titled *Pilates for Golfers*, a "dynamic workout to improve swing and game." There also is a Pilates book in the works.

In 1998, Nicholas was one of a half-dozen Pilates instructors

Moving Breath Studio

1801 S. JenTilly Lane, Tempe.
480-731-3101.
www.movingbreath.com.

Employees: Virginia Nicholas has a cadre of nearly a dozen instructors, mostly part-time contract employees.

Stats: There are about 125 people who regularly train at Moving Breath. A weekly group class runs about \$80 per month, while private lessons are \$70 per class. Other classes start as low as \$25 per class.

Quote: "Why do people do Pilates? It works. It's that simple," Nicholas said.

selected by Pilates professional Michelle Larson to become a Core Dynamics trainer and teach a new generation of Pilates instructors. Larson herself studied Pilates with Eve Gentry, considered a first-generation teacher because she trained directly with Joseph Pilates.

Since then, she has gone on to establish a PCI training program at her Tempe studio. There currently are eight people from this area in training and an additional 12 participating from other parts of the country.

W. Mesa Holiday Inn owners plan suites facility next door

By Jim Walsh
ARIZONA BUSINESS GAZETTE

The owners of a west Mesa Holiday Inn plan to build a Candlewood Suites Hotel next door in their parking lot, but a dearth of parking spaces could become an issue.

Royal Investment Group proposed the extended-stay hotel in a September pre-submittal to Mesa's Planning De-

partment, one of only a handful of projects filed in the past few months.

"It will be very nice. It will complement our hotel," said Ken Sliwa, manager of the Holiday Inn at Country Club Drive and U.S. 60. "It's going to upgrade everything. It will upgrade the image of this location."

Royal, also the Holiday Inn's owner, is investing \$3.5 million

in a major renovation of the 26-year-old property with 247 rooms, he said. The renovations are 90 percent completed.

The last major renovation was a decade ago and cost a previous owner \$5 million.

Sliwa said the Candlewood Suites would offer customers an option. Guests would be welcome to use the Holiday Inn's facilities, including a pool, restaurant and meeting rooms.

"It's like your own apartment, basically," for guests staying for a week or a month. "It will probably be one of the new prototypes. There's only several in the country."

Robert Brinton, president of the Mesa Convention and Visitors Bureau, said he is glad to hear Royal is moving forward with its plans.

"Adding more suites properties is a good thing for Mesa,"

Brinton said, with suites commonplace elsewhere in the Valley but not in Mesa. "We're obviously looking to improve the quality of hotels in Mesa."

Other suites in the area include a Residence Inn near Fiesta Mall and an Extended Stay America near Baseline Road and Country Club.

The plans were filed by architect Gerald Rembowski of Fairlawn, Ohio.