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Redefining Perceptions About Yoga

By Larissa Lytwyn

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Although Fairfield County is peppered with yoga studios specializing in everything from Eastern meditation to high-power Ashtanga, few focus on families. Sara Holland, the founder of the newly opened Growing Tree Yoga at 25 Van Zant St., hopes to redefine the perception of what yoga is and who can do it. "I'm a firm believer in the connection between mind and body," Holland said. "Yoga gets you back in touch with yourself. You realize you have more control from within than you may have realized."

A former physical educator and coach, Holland has more than six years of experience in childhood education, psychology and exercise. "I've always had a deep love for children and for sports and fitness," she said.

Holland wasn't always a devoted yogi. "I used to be the person always on the treadmill," she said. "I was always in the gym. I loved to run."

A track and field star in high school and college, Holland discovered yoga's "myriad benefits," she said, only a few years ago. "I wanted to try something different. I'd always had the impression yoga was about stretching and sitting and calming the mind. But it's about so much more. It really teaches you important skills, not only in relaxation but in discipline. It's also an amazing total-body workout."

Holland is a certified yoga instructor through Lotus Gardens, a yoga center based in Sherman. She is also a member of the American Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Additionally, Holland is certified in infant/child and adult cardiopulmonary resuscitation. She teaches the Growing Tree's children's yoga programs, "Parent & Child Yoga" and "StressLess Yoga for Adults." Growing Tree's additional instructors are Ruby Laughter and Karin Terebessy. Both women, Holland said, are longtime yoga adherents.

Holland acquired her studio through Glen Katz, the founder and manager of Integrated Sports Training, a facility for area athletes.

"Managing my own business has been my goal for a long time," Holland said. "I recognized the absence of family-centered yoga programs, and now I'm changing that."

Holland praised Katz's enthusiasm for Growing Tree Yoga. Katz "has been instrumental in making my dream a reality," she said. "We hope to collaborate further and enjoy a long, successful business relationship."

Holland said the name for Growing Tree Yoga is based in Eastern philosophy. "There are eight limbs in yoga," she said. "Each limb represents an aspect of achieving a healthy and fulfilling life." The tree symbol is emblematic of those goals, she said.

Growing Tree offers a number of programs for children and their families, as well as special events, including "Yoga Slumber Party" and "Yoga for Young Athletes." One-on-one consultations, private lessons, pre- and post-natal programs and children's parties also are available.

The biggest misperception is among parents "who tell their children yoga class will have them sit and relax," Holland said. "But it's so much bigger. Yoga requires a lot of focus and concentration, which is why it's so beneficial for children who are stressed about school, or children who have special needs, perhaps certain medical or psychological conditions."