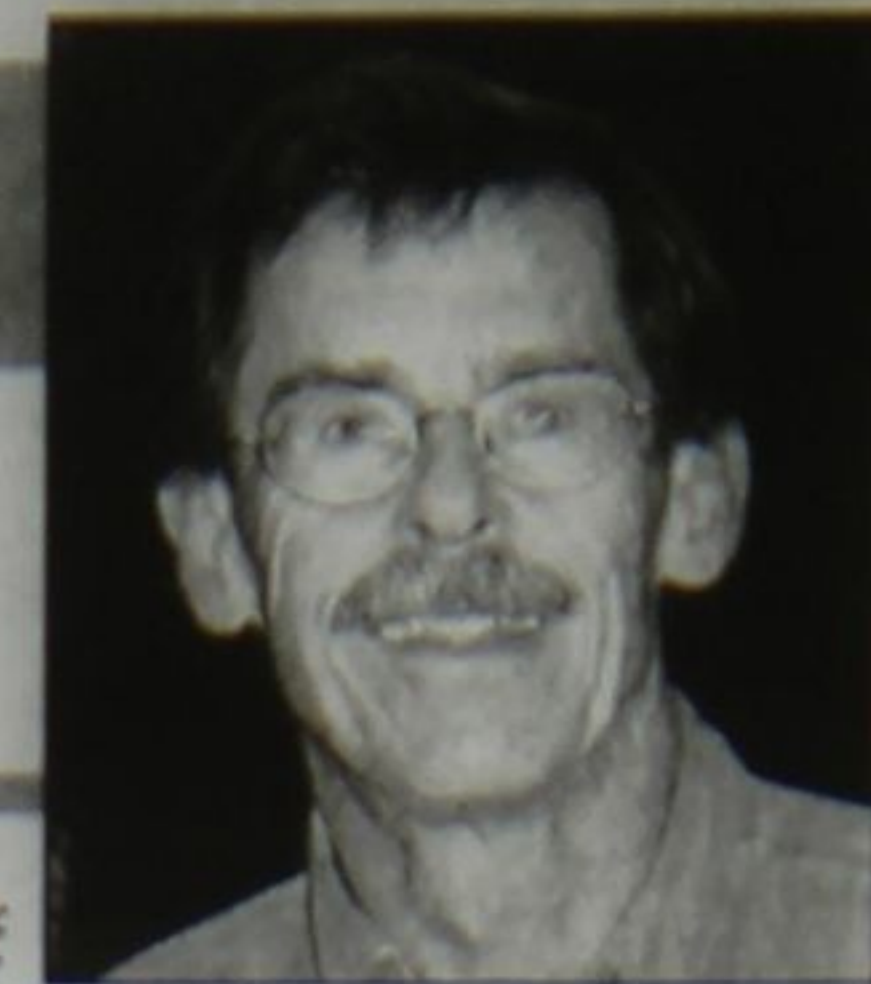


Out in Write Field Bent into shape



By Bruce Stapley

It's a scene that's played out every week night in rented cubicles, small units in industrial strip plazas and private home studios.

Multi-tasking ladies of the millennium, stressed out office workers, and stay at home moms and dads don't their sweats, grab their mats and head off to yoga class. For an hour or so they twist and contort their overworked bodies, breathe deeply and fully right into their abdomens, and generally untangle their harried minds, walking back out into the night feeling refreshed, grounded and fit.

Sure, downward dog may sound more like a trailer for a porn flick. But it is just one of a series of postures, positions and, in the case of those of us who have been somewhat neglectful of our fitness routines, punishments aimed at strengthening, toning and reinvigorating bodies that spend too much time scrunched up in front of computers or engaged in other daily practices that pose endless challenges to the well-being of mind, body and soul.

There was a time when yoga was considered the exclusive domain of those inhabiting the planet "Out There." But in recent years it has become as main-

stream as yogurt and green tea. Yes, there are some who still go a little overboard and claim yoga to be the universal elixir, the body and soul equivalent of the advent of sliced bread some years back.

But it is hard to argue with something that has for centuries been such a boon to the mental and physical well being of so many people worldwide. And you're really not expected to get so into it that you have to run out and buy enhancement products such as the eco-friendly Sati-Seat Zafu meditation cushion made with mindfulness, awareness and remembrance in order to offer you "Zensational" support.

Walk into any Stouffville yoga class -- and there are many -- and you will likely find a school teacher, a real estate agent, a shop keeper and a host of others. And yoga isn't just a domain for females. I personally know an upright lawyer, an accomplished professor/author and a hard working contractor -- all three of the male persuasion -- who regularly attend classes. In fact, men, if you act fast, you could sign up just in time to fill out Kendra West's Tuesday night co-ed yoga class in her comfortable and very informal Elements of Health home studio, complete with gas fireplace.

And not to worry if you're thinking of looking into yoga but are shy or self-conscious. In yoga, it's considered very bad form indeed to smirk at, mock in any way or ogle one's opposite sex classmates -- despite the inevitability that you may at some point come face to face with the buttocks, boobs or bellies of those positioned to one side or other of you while everyone attempts the more extreme postures.

You might as well not fight it anymore. Yoga is here to stay. So grab your neighbour, your friend, or even your spouse and head down to one of Stouffville's ever-expanding number of studios.

And, as they say by way of a greeting at any yoga class -- "Namaste".

Casting Off Winter Cold

Casting Off the Cold is a volunteer organization whose members devote time and skill to knitting and crocheting winter apparel to help needy families in the community and the greater Toronto area.

Established last year by Markham artist and knitter Sally Karamath, the group supplies hats, mitts, scarves, sweaters and socks to shelters such as Yellow Brick House that help those in need, especially during the harsh winter months.

"Since the group started knitting in the spring, we have received over 500 items from the knitters of Stouffville and the members of the group," said Ms. Karamath, who was overwhelmed by the generous local response.

"Also I will like to thank Pat Montgomery from Candlelight and Memories, Knitters Attic and Knitting Basket for their help in allowing the project to grow."

Warm clothing is a winter necessity that many people may not be able to afford, she said. Knitting some warmth for someone who may otherwise go without is the way the members of Casting Off the Cold give back to the community.

The group hopes to gather enough hand-knit items to donate to shelters and service organizations throughout the winter. Volunteers hold regular knitting circles and would be happy to help anyone improve a lost skill or perhaps learn a new one. The organization will also gladly accept donations of yarn to distribute to volunteer knitters.

Casting Off the Cold is affiliated with Street Knit Toronto, which has been distributing handcrafted winter clothing in the city for several years. In its first year the local project has garnered a good response, and Ms. Karamath is looking to expand the base of crafters' donations throughout the region.

Stouffville knitters can drop off finished items and yarn at Candlelight and Memories, 6198 Main St., or email Ms Karamath at castingoffthecold@gmail.com.



Artist and knitter Sally Karamath, founder of Casting Off the Cold, sorts through some beautiful local donations at Candlelight and Memories.

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