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Owner of new yoga studio in Sheboygan follows her dream

By Bob Petrie

Sheboygan Press staff

Jessica Warren, a 29-year-old mother of two from Kohler, can't say enough about the therapeutic qualities of yoga, and the teachings of Rachael Erin Haas.

"It's worth the time, it's totally worth the time," said Warren, who is taking classes at Haas' new Inspire Yoga Studio Boutique, 921 N. Eighth St. "I can tell the difference, I'm much more relaxed ... focused on what I need to get done, and it's nice to take time for myself and this is a really, really good way to do that."

Haas, 30, of Howards Grove, opened her studio in February on the second floor of the Rudnick Jewelers building, after teaching several years at the Sports Core in Kohler. She caters to all ages, including kids yoga classes, and has been offering several free community yoga sessions to drum up business.

Also, on Wednesday, April 30, Haas will host an open house from 6:30 to 9 p.m., with an advanced yoga demonstration at 7:30 p.m. On Friday, May 2, she will hold an art reception and open house from 6:30 to 9 p.m.

"I've always wanted to do it, I've had a dream to do it and to be able to create my own space where I could develop a bigger program," said Haas, who teaches yoga for strength, to relieve back pain, to reduce stress and for flexibility.

"There are definitely things that we can do if we do certain exercises," Haas said. "You can learn proper posture and you can learn to keep yourself strong and flexible and at the same time kind of in that optimal posture as well as being able to focus and relax your mind, to help you make clear decisions about your health."

After teaching yoga in other studios the past four years, Haas said it was a big decision to take the plunge and begin her own business. Her parents, Ron and Shelley Haas of Howards Grove, have been helping her get started.

"They've been really supportive of me following my dream," said Haas, who has been practicing yoga about eight years.

Among the techniques Haas teaches is Anusara, a power style of yoga developed about 10 years ago by John Friend, who she studied under in South Carolina. Haas has also taught in Chicago, and has worked with Debbie Williamson, another yoga instructor who has worked at the Sports Core and has studios elsewhere.

An avid athlete, Haas said she has been able to overcome some sports injuries with yoga, such as a hamstring tear. She has also studied physical therapy.

"I think it's very empowering because it gives you the ability to affect your own health," Haas said.

About 20 to 25 regulars have enrolled so far in Haas' classes, held in a long, narrow room with wood flooring and soft wall tones.

"I wanted to give people the experience of a yoga studio, which has a different ambience and a different feel, to create a space where people walk in and they automatically feel good and relaxed," Haas said.

Rates at Inspire vary; drop-in classes are \$10 per session, with a small fee for a mat. For kids and teens, ages 5 to 15, classes are \$8, and discounts are available. Private yoga sessions are priced higher. She also has a tie-in with the nearby Above and Beyond Children's Museum, where parents can drop children at the museum for activities while the adults take yoga classes at Inspire.

As for the downtown location, Haas said, "I love it, it's perfect."

Among the dozen or so people who took a recent community class was Cindy Nesst, 50, of Howards Grove, who was in her second session with Haas. Nesst, who said she recently had a knee replacement, was looking for a low-impact style of yoga to get started.

"She showed me how to do things like sitting in a chair and stretching, just to relax," said Nesst.

Carrie McWithey, 28, of Sheboygan, has taken several yoga classes with Haas in the past, but is studying yoga for the first time under her.

"The way that she does it makes it authentic, and it makes you want to come and take her classes," she said.

As for Haas' first foray into her own studio, McWithey has full confidence in her teacher.

"She'll be fine," McWithey said. "The business world is not that bad."