

Mona Cenicerros opened the Sun/Moon yoga studio in downtown Mankato. The move allows Cenicerros a base for her instruction while representing the growing 'mainstreaming' of the practice. The studio focuses on the physical aspects of yoga.



John Cross photo/Free Press photo illustration

Mona Cenicerros hopes to bring the 6,000-year-old practice of yoga to the mainstream with her new downtown corner shop



John Cross

Sun/Moon offers different levels of yoga instruction. Cenicerros (center) worked with (from left) Micki Shaffer, Judy Lucier, Cathy Kaliski and Candy Bell.

A higher level of EXERCISE

by Joe Tougas
Free Press Staff Writer

Some myths, and their factual counterparts, about yoga:

Myth: It's easy. You sit and, um, breathe.

Fact: It actually demands discipline and, om, concentration.

Myth: It's a throwback fad, enjoyed by well-intentioned aging hippies who still read Kurt Vonnegut novels.

Fact: The National Institute of Health, Mayo Clinic and, just recently, the U.S. Army have come on board to praise its benefits. And Kurt Vonnegut novels are still great.

Myth: Because of its limited appeal, yoga centers tend to be tucked into small pockets of urban areas next to used book-

stores that sell old Kurt Vonnegut books, or in third-floor YWCA lofts in Mankato.

Fact: Pull up a mat at Sun/Moon Yoga at the corner of Front and Liberty streets in downtown Mankato, near the Once Read bookstore.

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It is perhaps a true measure of exactly how mainstream yoga has become. Should it survive in a storefront location in downtown Mankato — next to a shop that sells police gear — chances are the 6,000-year-old Hindu practice has indeed arrived.

Owner Mona Cenicerros was eager to rent this corner shop, heavy on windows, sunlight and calm. In the lobby, stereo

speakers play sounds of ocean waves and harp strings. Sink into a couch here and you may, for the first time, develop an interest in fresh water, caffeine-free teas and magazines such as *Massage* ("Learn Muscle Awareness with Body Rolling") all available here.

But businesses, no matter how calm, need business.

"I have confidence in yoga," she said. "Businessmen have told me it could be risky. It's not like it's a Subway sandwich place, with a proven record. But yoga's been around for thousands of years."

Her confidence is bolstered by a promising roster of students who signed up for, and filled, classes here before the doors opened. Classes remain booked until the end of March,

and her database of clients (defined as those who have had more than one class with her) numbers past 300.

Cenicerros' name has been synonymous with yoga in Mankato for the past six years, but her own association with it dates back to the Beatles. Like many teen-age fans in the late 1960s, she was intrigued by the whole transcendental thing the Fab Four were making headlines exploring.

"It was trendy then, like it is now," she said. "It went out of style, but I liked it. I stayed with it."

Yoga was a hobby, a side interest, until a back injury 10 years ago. Cenicerros hurt her back as the result of another fad: high-impact aerobics, which she taught and practiced until she got a herniated disc.

"I was one of the casualties of that whole movement," she said.

As part of her rehabilitation after surgery, she was instructed to perform a variety of muscle and movement exercises — many of which seemed quite familiar.

"They were yoga," she said. "I rehabilitated my back after that surgery with yoga. That probably was the turning point to when I became a yoga nut."

She started sneaking yoga

into her aerobic instructions — she just switched some terms around. "Floor poses," for instance, instead of "yoga."

After getting her teaching certification at the White Lotus Foundation in Santa Barbara, Calif., Cenicerros began teaching in Mankato about six years ago, working in a variety of locations — elementary schools, the YWCA and the like. The demand had her teaching 10 to 12 classes a week in five locations.

"I was doing yoga out of the back of my car, basically," she said.

For three years, she saved money to open her own studio, all the while teaching yoga in choir rooms, theater stages and cafeterias. She also teaches anatomy and physiology at Sister Rosalind Gefre School of Professional Massage, teaches part time in the health science and women's studies departments at Minnesota State University and is a certified personal trainer.

Unlike the higher spiritual meaning sought by the Beatles (which resulted in one too many sitar tunes on "Sgt. Pepper"), the yoga taught by Cenicerros and staff at

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YOGA: More men are taking classes

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Sun/Moon is based entirely on the physical aspect — hatha — of yoga. The yoga exercises at Sun/Moon are just that, she says, exercises. None of which, she stresses, clash with Christianity or other religious beliefs.

The mainstreaming — or the Main Streeting — of yoga is evidenced by more men taking classes, she said, and by the popularity of the studio's "yoga happy hour." Every Friday from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m., drop-ins can come in and plop down a mat and pay \$5 for a session.

"It's almost like an open house, really," she said. "We have yet to turn anybody away,

but the day will come."

Insurance agent Jay Weir has been a student of Ceniceros' for a year and a half. Referred to yoga by a brother as a way to relax, Weir is using it for physical fitness as well.

"I'm kind of a runner, I'm 35 and not very flexible," Weir laughed.

"This will be a way to help me touch my toes."

Weir is in Ceniceros' Ashtanga class.

In this town, there really hasn't been a place to do [yoga]. There's a place for it now, which will also bring it into the mainstream.

Jay Weir

addition to yoga, it also offers personal training, with the

"I don't know a ton about yoga, but it's a little more challenging," Weir said. "It's kind of like calisthenics."

The Sun/Moon Studios offers Intro to Yoga, Hatha Yoga (flexibility exercises and muscle work) and individual classes. In

emphasis on flexibility; massage therapy with therapist Cathy Kaliski; and an upcoming yoga instructor training program.

"In this town, there really hasn't been a place to do this," said Weir, who had previously taken his yoga above the YWCA.

"There's a place for it now, which will also bring it into the mainstream."

Ceniceros still teaches outside the studio but wants the downtown location to be known for afternoons and evenings of high-caliber exercise.

"I'm going for quality instruction," Ceniceros said. "I'd rather do a good job with a small number of people."