

# Magic *touch*



Thai massage is different from traditional massage in several ways, one of which is that subjects lie on a mat on a floor instead of on a table. That way, Thai massage therapists can use not only their hands and elbows, but also knees and feet. They also use several techniques that involve yoga-like positions with all the work being done by the therapist.

## New massage makes its way to Mankato

By Robb Murray  
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**MANKATO** — In a softly lit room at the Sun Moon Yoga Studios, Molly Mayer is showing off the new massage techniques she learned in Thailand.

Her subject lies face up on a mat on the floor, eyes closed. Mayer, facing him, starts at his feet, gently tipping them outward until his toes nearly touch the mat. She moves slowly up the leg, her thumbs and palms pressing the flesh in a slow, calculated, delicate progression. Deep drums and rhythmic bells stream from speakers in the Earth Room. Within minutes, he is nearly asleep.

Later, she intertwines her leg with his and plants her foot in his thigh. She simultaneously pulls the leg and pushes the thigh. And later, while her subject lies face down, she plants her foot in his back and lifts his legs into the air, creating an oddly soothing and comfortable arch. As he exhales, she lowers him.

By now, one thing has become abundantly clear: This is not your typical massage. Despite the contortions, he remains nearly asleep. "Wow," he says, rubbing his eyes. "That was amazing."

Mayer is demonstrating the art of Thai massage, which she learned a few months ago during a trip to Thailand. Now that she's back, she's ready to share what she's learned.

"Society is getting to be so touch-free," Mayer said, "and the benefit of touch can be very powerful ... When someone touches you in a positive way, it can make a world of difference."

### Ancient art

First, a little on Thai massage, or as some have called it, "the lazy man's yoga."

Some may hear the term Thai massage and think of a much more, um, carnal experience. (Some Bangkok massage parlors are well-known for being nothing more than glorified brothels.)

But true Thai massage dates back 2,500 years and, unlike its seedy counterpart, is rooted in medicine. In Thailand, in fact, it is known as medical massage. It first came to Thailand from India where its practice was limited to the monks in Buddhist temples. Eventually it left the temples and



Photos by John Cross

Molly Mayer performs Thai massage on Mona Cenicerros. Mayer returned from Thailand where she spent three weeks learning the craft

entered Thai society.

It got the "lazy man's yoga" nickname because, in some respects, Thai massage's contortions resemble yoga positions. The difference is the receiver does little. The

work is done by the therapist. In regular massage, therapists use their hands, arms and elbows to knead and rub a person's tension away. In Thai massage, they use hands, arms, elbows, knees, feet —

any body part available, really.

"You're manipulated more," Mayer said.

The technique's focal point is something called the "hara," which essentially is the abdomen. The

theory, without getting bogged down in technicalities, is that all energy resonates from the hara, and so the massage movements are done in sync with the hara.

Thai massage works to ease energy lines throughout the body. Massaging those lines is supposed to free up tension within them, allowing energy to flow better. In this sense, it is similar — and has been compared to — acupuncture. Practitioners say that among Thai massage's benefits are increased flexibility, relief of emotional stress, sounder sleep and improved athletic performance.

### New Thai girl

Before Mayer's trip to Thailand, the only other person offering Thai massage sessions in Mankato was her boss, Mona Cenicerros, who focuses mainly on yoga but still offers Thai massage. She said she's excited about having another person on staff who can do it.

Mayer was born and raised in St. Peter and studied dance at the University of Minnesota. It was during her college career when she first heard of Thai massage. After graduating from the U of M in 1998, she returned to the area and began working at Sun Moon teaching yoga classes. Eventually, she decided to pursue Thai massage and researched where she could go to get the training she needed.

She had two options: California or Thailand. After learning she could get three weeks of training in Thailand for the same price of one week in California, she chose Thailand. She studied at the Institute of Thai Massage and did some traveling during September and October.

Now she's back and ready to start booking appointments for Thai massage.

"She really is an amazing woman," Cenicerros said of Mayer. "She has a lot of different talents — such as yoga, dance, Thai massage — that appear to be diverse but are very related."

While training in Thailand, many of Mayer's guinea pigs were Thai people. Coming back to American meant dealing with larger bodies, which is really the only realm of limit that exists for a Thai massage therapist. Bodies that weigh 140 pounds are one thing. But a 250-pound lineman — unless the therapist is also a body builder — probably wouldn't be able to be lifted as was described above.

For now, Mayer charges \$30 per hour and is mainly doing one-hour sessions. Eventually she'll move on to two-hour sessions.

Said Mayer, "There's a real sense of gratification when you've made someone feel better."