



Kim Johnson of Hollis balances on one leg in a workshop for instructors led by Coral Brown, a senior teacher trainer of Prana Flow yoga, at YogaBalance studio in Manchester. Johnson, a mother of five, teaches yoga in Merrimack and says the practice is her stress reliever. PHOTOS BY BRUCE PRESTON / UNION LEADER

## Mainstream yoga

### Granite Staters tout the practice's benefits for a stressed-out world

By MIKE CULLITY  
New Hampshire Union Leader

MANCHESTER

ON A RECENT Saturday afternoon, the YogaBalance studio on Hooksett Road was a sea of motion. With the late-May sun bathing the room in warmth, instructor Coral Brown led 14 women through a series of postures while soothing Indian music played in the background. As the students stretched and breathed on their floor mats, Brown mingled among them, assisting with their maneuvers.

"Enjoy it," the instructor encouraged. "Take the time to be in your practice and surrender." The vigorous afternoon class was part of a daylong workshop on collective flow yoga, a practice that's part of the Prana Flow discipline Brown teaches. A 38-year-old Rhode Island instructor, Brown has studied under Shiva Rea, the Prana Flow method's California-based creator, and offers similar workshops across the country. She also has trained in India, Morocco and Bali and recently appeared on the cover of Yoga Journal, a national magazine for yoga enthusiasts.

An energetic mentor whose upbeat manner lightened the mood of a sometimes strenuous endeavor, Brown ended the class by leading the students in chanting the incantation "om." Afterward, she talked about the virtues of yoga, an ancient Indian practice that has become increasingly popular in New Hampshire.

"Yoga is more than just physical exercise on the mat," she explained. "It becomes a lifestyle, a way of being."

Although many Americans, perhaps wary of yoga's spiritual components, long regarded the practice as a little "out there" for their taste, it has become more mainstream in this country in recent years. Recognizing yoga's physical, mental and emotional benefits, physicians and mental-health practitioners are increasingly recommending the practice to their patients, Brown said.

"As it's become more popular, the esoteric veil is lifted away and it becomes more accessible," she said.

One student who attended Brown's workshop, Kristen Howson, began practicing yoga a couple of years ago and has experienced its benefits.

"I've had some pain issues, and it has helped quite a bit," the 43-year-old Weare resident said. "And it's taken my anxiety way down."

Kim Johnson, a Hollis resident who teaches at New Hampshire Power Yoga in Merrimack, attended the workshop to learn more about the



Elizabeth Croteau of Windham participates in Coral Brown's Prana Flow yoga workshop. Brown also leads retreats, workshops and teacher trainings and is a frequent contributor and conference presenter for Yoga Journal magazine.

Prana Flow method. Practicing yoga helps her maintain balance in her life, she said.

"I have five kids," she explained. "I need it. It's my way to relieve stress."

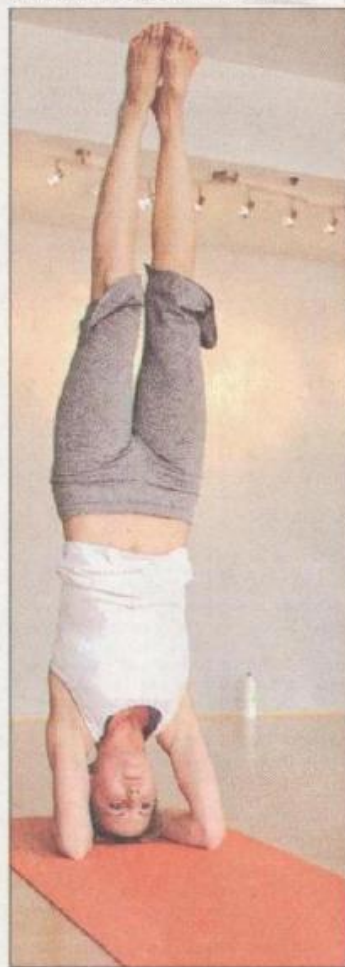
#### Thriving studios

After practicing yoga for five years, Manchester attorneys Ron and Ann Weikers decided to make it their business, buying YogaBalance in 2008 when the previous owner relocated to Florida.

"It's not unusual for people in our profession to seek yoga out because our jobs are so stressful," Ann said. "We didn't want to lose (YogaBalance), so we bought it."

The couple relocated the studio from its previous West Side location to more spacious

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Meghan Bilek of East Derry stands on her head during Coral Brown's workshop. Owners of New Hampshire yoga studios say business is thriving as the practice becomes more mainstream.



Grace Ng of Salem smiles during last week's workshop in Prana Flow yoga in Manchester.

## Yoga

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digs in the city's North End last August. In renovating the space, the owners imbued it with a bright, modern feel that one might expect to find in big cities such as Boston or New York. Their work has paid off, with business tripling since the move, Ron said.

YogaBalance attracts students from Manchester and several surrounding communities with a diverse array of yoga offerings, including occasional workshops with nationally known instructors such as Brown, said Karen Kenney, the studio's director.

Meanwhile, growing interest in yoga has been a boon to other New Hampshire studios.

Since opening four years ago, Sharing Yoga in Concord has experienced steady growth, owner David Breen said. The downtown studio, which began as a single room, has grown to three rooms covering about 900 square feet. "And we're looking for a fourth," Breen said.

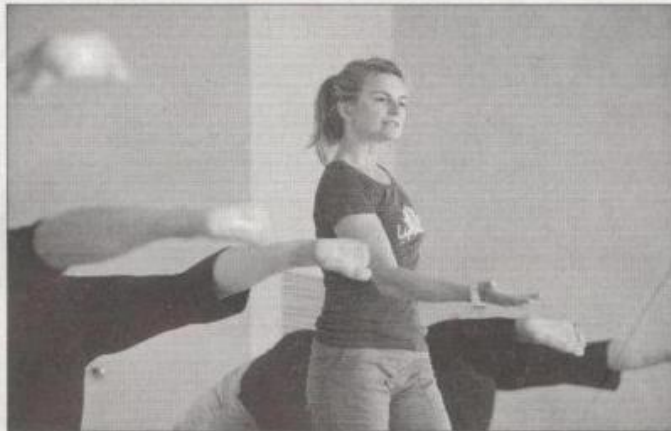
Sharing Yoga started out offering a few classes a week and now offers 20 to 25 weekly classes. Much of its growth occurred amid the recession, Breen said.

"As the economy got worse, our business got better," he said. "I think maybe people were looking for some way to take care of themselves, reduce stress and live better."

Sharing Yoga also offers a 200-hour yoga teacher training program, which has grown from three students to 25 students in four years, he said.

The studio caters to a slightly older clientele, with many students in their 40s, 50s and 60s, Breen said.

"We offer a style where we try to accommodate everybody," he said. "If you come



Coral Brown, a senior teacher trainer of Prana Flow yoga, leads a yoga workshop for instructors at YogaBalance yoga studio in Manchester. Brown also leads retreats, workshops and teacher trainings and is a frequent contributor and conference presenter for Yoga Journal magazine.

Coral Brown, far center, leads the yoga class for instructors at YogaBalance yoga studio in Manchester's North End. Yoga studio owners say interest in yoga is on the rise in New Hampshire.

BRUCE PRESTON PHOTOS / UNION LEADER



in and you're older and stiffer, you'll fit right in here."

#### Physical emphasis

Six-year-old Bikram Yoga in Manchester met a growing

demand by expanding last September. Located in a West Side mill building, the studio offers up to 30 weekly classes that can accommodate 45 to 48 students comfortably, about 10 more than the studio could before its expansion,

said owner Pubali Campbell.

Bikram, a style of yoga practiced in a room heated to 105 degrees, is a series of 26 postures and two breathing exercises aimed at developing physical and mental stamina, said Campbell, who is a cousin



Elizabeth Croteau of Windham practices a pose during the yoga workshop for instructors.

of the method's creator, Bikram Choudhury.

"Our practice doesn't incorporate a lot of spiritual or esoteric elements to it," she said. "Our philosophy is very specific that we want to heal and strengthen the body first."

As the attendance at Brown's YogaBalance workshop suggests, women compose the majority in most yoga classes.

But men such as Will Cosgrove find value in the practice as well.

A 41-year-old Manchester sales consultant, Cosgrove

has practiced yoga for about five years and is enrolled in Sharing Yoga's teacher training program primarily to deepen his yoga knowledge.

"For me it's a workout," he said. "It strengthens and elongates my muscles, jaw stretches me out. And mentally there's some benefits to just being present and slowing things down a little bit in a busy world. I think, for guys, it's a good complement to anything they're doing as far as physical exercise and working out. It only helps with balance, strength and flexibility."