

Enjoy gentle yoga at Friendship Centre

Next series of sessions is a fundraiser for new Centre

By Nancy Vermont

SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL ARGUS

It's Thursday morning upstairs at the Friendship Centre, also known as the karate room. Six to ten of us are sitting or lying on our yoga mats (purchased in class or at Market Exposure). Some of us are enjoying just being quiet; others are talking softly. Soothing music sets the tone.

Presently, Joanne Pineau, our yoga teacher, welcomes us in her gentle voice and invites us to

lie on our backs. With knees straight or bent, whichever is the most comfortable, we take a few minutes to become aware and settled in our bodies and with our surroundings. Joanne invites us to put all our thoughts and anxieties about the past or future into an imaginary bundle and place them "outside the door." This time is for us, a gift we give ourselves for an hour and a half each week.

With Joanne's reminders, we become aware of what is around us, what we see, hear, and how it feels to be lying there. Gradually we let go of tension and allow the floor to support us. For the rest of the

class time Joanne clearly directs us in a series of movements and poses in which we gently stretch in almost every possible way. There is no pressure to do the movements or poses exactly like someone else does them, and there is no competition. Yoga has to do with being with your own body and feeling the poses and moves "from the inside."

Starting out, the movements can feel a bit awkward, but after a few weeks of coming to class, they become more enjoyable to do. The spine gets to stretch and gently twist and bend as we mindfully "listen" to our own bodies. Sometimes we stand motionless, rooted through our feet, in "mountain" pose.

The flexibility of mind and body, the strength and peacefulness gained from these sessions together are carried into the rest of the day and week. And we feel so good after a yoga class, we wonder why more people aren't taking advantage of this gift available to us. Could Joanne's yoga classes be one of St. Marys' "best kept secrets"?

Those of us benefiting from the classes want to share this "secret" with people who may have been afraid to try something new. Yoga is not a religion and it is not an impossible set of "contortionist" movements. We do the movements according to our own abilities. It's about slow-

ing down, feeling and becoming aware of our bodies; it's about small changes. We learn to take care of ourselves and to wake up to life within and around us. Yoga also leads to new friendships, so is aptly done at the Friendship Centre.

For those working on weekdays, Joanne has

two evening classes at her studio north of town: Mondays at 7:30 p.m. and Thursdays at 8. You can call Joanne at 284-4072 or email her at info@stambournefarm.ca for more information.

The next series of eight sessions at the Friendship Centre begins on Thursday, March 6 at 10 a.m. This series of

classes is a fundraiser for the Centre, and the minimum donation for the series is \$25. Wear comfortable clothing and bring a small pillow and blanket. You can borrow a mat from Joanne. To register, please call the Friendship Centre at 284-3272.

There, the secret is out! Tell your friends.