



Just Breathe

BY PAIGE EATON

FITNESS HAS ALWAYS BEEN A WAY OF LIFE for Theresa Polley. For years, she attended and participated in exercise regimens including Pilates, which builds core strength and stability; rigorous indoor “spin” cycling classes; running; and triathlons.

Although she enjoyed participating in these activities and classes, Polley, a natural introvert, had never considered teaching. Then, one day at a spin class, an instructor failed to show up, and other students asked Polley to lead the class. Looking back, she says that was the boost of confidence that directed her to the path that is now her profession: presenting and leading women’s yoga retreats. While she developed her confidence in spin class, she found her peace of self in yoga.

“Yoga saved my life,” Polley says. “I had a couple of challenges in my life. My mom died, and then I was laid off from my job, and I was having trouble in my marriage.” She says a friend suggested that she try yoga to help her cope.

“It was a life-changing moment. I got so much out of it. It’s not so much the physical aspect, but yoga is a mind-body-and-spirit sort of thing,” she says. “I fell in love with yoga, and then

I was encouraged to teach yoga. Now, [practicing] yoga and teaching yoga is my favorite thing to do.”

To fulfill her love of yoga and teaching it, she developed Retreat in the Pines, a studio and retreat center deep in the woods near Mineola. Each weekend, she hosts a yoga retreat for up to 15 women who travel from all over the country.

Polley’s retreats are designed to be a haven and sanctuary where women gather to share their hearts, good food, a little wine, a lot of laughter and community. She says she’d been to retreats before, but they were more about abstaining than retreating. There was no “retreat” involved; they felt more like torture.

“I love coffee and dark chocolate and wine. Life is about enjoying yourself,” she says. “Here, we meditate, we do yoga, but we also enjoy ourselves. These retreats are as much about self-care and community and good food as much as they are about yoga.”

A typical women’s retreat starts Friday evening and ends Sunday. Each has a specific purpose or theme, such as self-nurture, strength and healing, inspiration and art, finding gratitude, or mindfulness and meditation. All classes, led by

OPPOSITE: Through life's struggles, financial and otherwise, Theresa Polley used determination and hard work to build her yoga retreat to help and inspire other women.

BELOW: Surrounded by nature, Teresa, front center, leads a class on the woodland yoga deck of Retreat in the Pines.



Polley or another professional yoga instructor, are suitable for students of all levels of yoga, including beginners. Although there's no formula for each event, most begin at Friday afternoon check-in with snacks and hot and cold tea. At about 5 p.m. there's a wine happy hour, and then the women gather at the large table at around 6 p.m. for a community dinner, followed by some relaxation yoga.

These retreats are not boot camp-style, but more meditative and restorative. She says many times, women put themselves last while they take care of everyone else, all the while just trying to hold it together. Polley says she wanted to build a place for a community of women to be understanding of one another and encouraging to each other.

"This is a safe place for women to come," she says. "All of the women support and encourage each other." She also says that because it is a women-only community, no one worries about their makeup or how they look. The idea is for them to just focus on self, relaxation and enjoying one another's company.

April Thomson, a busy office manager and a Houston accountant in the oil and gas industry, is a frequent Retreat in the Pines participant.

"I have practiced yoga off and on for about 12 years," she says. "I'm a marathon runner. It's my primary sport, and yoga is my recovery sport. Around 2014, I had a friend that had gone there years prior. She had told me about it. My husband was going out of town, and I had a weekend available and went."

Of her experience, she says, "It's a place I can reset and rejuvenate, and then go back into the world and do what I need to do. There is spirituality about the place that you just

cannot explain. I often describe it as 'my happy place.' ... You meet other women, and it's always been a very open and giving environment. Everyone shares. And you learn a new perspective on things. Usually each weekend is based on a theme. Every time I've gone, I've needed that theme in my life, and it has helped me refocus and keep going."

Retreat in the Pines is little known throughout the region, but it's making a positive economic ripple throughout the local economy. Most Saturdays after breakfast and morning yoga, the ladies have a several-hour break. Some stay at the retreat to enjoy nature, but many sightsee and shop in nearby towns such as Mineola and Winnsboro, go to the Mineola Nature preserve, or visit local vineyards.

Polley encourages everyone to go into town. Groups of ladies will go, and she says they always come back talking about it.

Past retreat attendee Cheryl Cooper, who resides in Ohio and is retired from the Air Force, is also a fan of Retreat in the Pines. She says she was looking for something to rekindle the feeling of relaxation she had when she practiced yoga years before, but she was also hoping to do it affordably. She found Retreat in the Pines via an internet search.

"If you talk about 'bang for your buck,' this is the place." She says she checked retreats near her and discovered it was cheaper for her to buy plane tickets and attend Retreat in the Pines.

"I felt so relaxed and unplugged," Cooper says. "It's very organized. The yoga sessions and meditation were wonderful. It reconnected me with yoga, and it was an amazing weekend."



Cloaked on all sides by its namesake pine trees, the view from the front porch of Retreat in the Pines is serene.



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As the weekend wound down, she says, “A couple of the girls told me I was glowing. I knew I felt that way on the inside, but I did not know you could see it on the outside.”

Many times, Polley’s guests come in groups, but just as often, women come solo. She says she has heard so many women say they did not think the retreat would be for them; afterward, their assessment is quite the opposite.

In addition to feeding the mind and the spirit, this place of retreat also feeds the body—and in a very special way. Retreat in the Pines chef Kaycee Turner specializes in farm-to-table dishes, sourcing her ingredients locally from East Texas. She prepares all her meals with in-season produce and buys the meat from local farms. Her meals are made from scratch without any processed ingredients. She also makes homemade rustic breads and mixes her own granola.

“The food was amazing,” Cooper says. “That was another thing that attracted me to the place. They have a lot of organic and locally grown food.”

Polley is building a following for Retreat in the Pines, and she’s planning more. “My dream is to have five-night retreats and to add excursions like enjoying music in Winnsboro and experiencing other area attractions.” She is also adding a separate dining hall, under construction now.

“Yoga has gotten the reputation of being hard,” she says, encouraging first-timers to yoga or the retreat. “It’s really whatever you want it to be. You use your own body to strengthen itself ... Retreat in the Pines is an ideal place for beginners.”

Everyone is encouraged at their own pace, or even no pace. They can just sit in the midst and relax and soak it all in. Also, there’s no special expensive equipment needed. Yoga is practiced barefoot, and any clothing is fine as long as it’s loose and allows movement. But Polley also has a nicely stocked store for those interested in purchasing yoga outfits.

As more encouragement to consider yoga, Polley says that yoga is gaining a reputation in medical communities for increasing health and well-being. Among the benefits is that it offers low-impact exercise that increases flexibility and balance, builds muscle strength, and helps prevent cartilage breakdown. It also improves bone health and has been shown to reduce blood pressure and even cholesterol levels. It offers a calmness of mind that flows into other areas of life for more restful sleep and a greater overall sense of happiness.

Polley is a certified instructor with 200-plus hours of training in the physical, historical and anatomical aspects of yoga.

“I also practice yoga five to six days a week,” she says. “Doing yoga keeps me centered and grounded. I want to be present. I want to be grateful. I want to be strong. Yoga helps me do all of those. I’m humbled that I get to do this. I get to meet these wonderful strong and inspiring women.”

For those on the fence about learning yoga or attending an all-inclusive stay at Retreat in the Pines, Polley says, “To do yoga, all you have to be able to do is breathe.”

To learn more about Retreat in the Pines, a member of Wood County Electric Cooperative, visit the website to search for, learn about and book upcoming retreats.

Is Your Fridge Ready for Thanksgiving?

IF THANKSGIVING DINNER IS AT YOUR HOUSE THIS YEAR, your family members aren't the only ones who will be stuffed. So will your refrigerator. Is it up to the task?

If your fridge is more than a decade old, it might not be adequate. Today's models—specifically those bearing the Energy Star label—use at least 15 percent less energy than federal standards require, and 40 percent less than models from the early 2000s, according to the Department of Energy.

Yet more than 60 million households in the U.S. have refrigerators that are more than 10 years old, according to the DOE. By replacing yours with a new, energy-efficient model, you could save up to \$300 in electricity charges over its lifetime.

When shopping for a new refrigerator or freezer, read the EnergyGuide label. It tells you how many kilowatt-hours of electricity the unit will likely consume over a year of operation. The smaller the number, the better. Look for refrigerators that have a freezer on the bottom or the top, as side-by-side designs consume more energy. Chest freezers are typically better insulated than upright models.

Whether or not you're buying a new fridge this year, follow these tips for more efficient use around the holidays:

▶ Brush or vacuum your refrigerator's coils regularly to improve its energy efficiency by as much as 30 percent.

▶ Keeping your refrigerator full shouldn't be hard at this time of year, and doing so will help your unit retain the cold better. If you have trouble keeping it stocked, fill the extra space with containers of water.

▶ If your milk is icy in the morning, reduce the refrigerator's temperature. Refrigerators should be set between 36 and 40 degrees. Freezers should stay between 0 and 5 degrees.

▶ Put a dollar bill in the door's seal to see if it is airtight. If the dollar slips out easily, so will cold air.



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