



Photos by Bethany Stiltner

At The Yoga Lifestyle Center in Phoenixville, a class concentrates on breathing techniques, one of the most important pathways to quieting the body's systems, says Bob Butera, owner of the center. Below right, Laura Woolford, 10, bends her body into the shape of a tepee, one of the yoga poses she learned in a beginning children's yoga class at The Spirit of Yoga center in West Chester.

# Take a break and let the body, mind **BREATHE**

Yoga's approach to stress reduction finds its way into a growing number of American lives

By **JUDITH CAPAR**  
Staff Writer

**W**ith school, soccer and gymnastics on her schedule, Christine Wesley, 8, took a break and relaxed - in a yoga class.

"I felt happy," Christine said after an hour of deep breathing, yoga poses and, finally, 15 minutes of guided imagery and relaxation.

Linda Wesley brought her daughter to The Spirit of Yoga center in West Chester for the beginner class because she feels kids, like adults, need a release from the hectic pace of activities.

"I think yoga is a calming influence, a change of pace and will give her a way to relax," said Wesley, a practitioner of yoga who participated along with Christine.

Instructor Alison Donley smoothly led the children through the lesson, using imagery and sounds suited to their age level - 8 to 10 - to help them along.

"Put your shoulders on a hanger," she said, demonstrating the correct posture for deep



**Christine Wesley, 8, masters one of the trickier moves - a kind of modified tripod - as instructor Alison Donley spots her to make sure she doesn't fall during the children's yoga class at The Spirit of Yoga center.**

breathing.

The children were quick studies as they followed Donley's lead and shaped their bodies into "cobras" and "tables." The only time they faltered slightly was near the end when Donley showed them a tricky balance, putting their knees on their forearms in a kind of tripod without the head touching the ground.

Donley said children are "so open and so awesome" that they take to yoga easily, and despite the

range of activities in their lives, enjoy the time to simply lie still during the relaxation part of the class.

"They don't have that fear yet," she said of learning something new. "They're used to moving their bodies. I think it's fun for them. And it's a great activity that parents and children can do together. I would love to see it become a lifelong interest."

It took retirement from her job



as a supervising public health nurse in the Chester County Health Department to give Jean Rabenau of Downingtown the chance to get back to yoga, which she practiced when she lived in California.

"I enjoyed it then very much, and then time passes and you don't have much time to spend on such things," said Rabenau, 61. "Since I retired in July, that's given me the opportunity to get back into some of the things I've wanted to do for years."

This fall, Rabenau completed a beginner yoga class, taught by Donley, at Chester County Hospital's Center for Health and Fitness and is now in an intermediate group.

"I certainly recommend it for people of all ages. I'm the oldest one in the class and you just work at your own level," said Rabenau. "I think it's making me feel physically stronger. I'm doing a lot of home remodeling and painting and working for long stretches, and I'm wondering why I have the stamina to do it. The only thing I can figure out is the yoga."

From strength and muscle balance to improving muscle elasticity and range of motion, yoga, the ancient Hindu tradition that unites body and mind, has experienced a surge in popularity in the last decade or so, yoga practitioners say.

Georg Feuerstein, the internationally known founder of the Yoga Research and Education Center in California, says yoga - which he calls a "current of spirituality - now has 12 million