

Yoga center thrives in 'down-on-its-luck town'

By **MARTHA VOLLMER**
Special to The Phoenix

PHOENIXVILLE — A down-on-its-luck ex-steel mill town might have been an odd choice for locating a yoga teaching center, but in the year and a half since Robert Butera's Yoga Lifestyle Center opened on Bridge Street in downtown Phoenixville, business has steadily increased, and the center recently received national recognition for its unique approach to teaching yoga.

Butera is in the process of writing a training manual that will be used across the country.

Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D., founder of the Yoga Research Center in northern California

and a contributing editor to Yoga Journal, started work on a collaborative project between the northern California center and Phoenixville's Yoga Lifestyle Center.

What distinguishes Butera's approach, according to Feuerstein, is the philosophical lecture and discussion before each class.

"Yoga is more than stretching. There's a whole mindset that's behind the physical postures," Butera said. "Presenting the ideas is one aspect. Then, in each class, we literally practice what we preach."

At a recent beginner's-level

See YOGA, Page A6.



Staff photo by Barry Taglieber

A class at the Phoenixville Yoga Lifestyle Center Wednesday night.

YOGA

(Continued From Page A1)

class, the group of eight students shared their views — troubles and solutions — with the methods of mediation that were presented.

One woman claimed she couldn't sit still long enough without writing down lists of everything she needed to do.

"All the time people were asking me to do things for them," another woman said. "The problem is there's only one of me and I'm the kind of person who can't say no. Now I do one thing at a time. And best of all I sleep 'til 7 a.m. and it's really hard to get me out of bed, thanks to this class. Before I used to be up at 4 or 5 a.m., worrying."

Unlike yoga classes given at other schools or YMCA's, the Yoga Lifestyle Center does not permit drop-in attendance. Each

five-week course includes reading materials and a discussion is held prior to each session. Topics such as "Yoga and Mindfulness" and "Diaphragmatic Breathing" are discussed at different classes.

A bookstore at the center offers a collection of books on yoga, vegetarian cooking (there's even a recipe for soy scrapple in one book), philosophy, and health issues.

The focus is getting people to adapt a healthier lifestyle, Butera said, and not just stretching and meditating in a classroom for an hour and a half per week.

"Yoga has a very sophisticated philosophy toward work," Butera said. "Work is seen as a way of purifying oneself. When we're in pressure situations, like when the bathroom's leaking, how do we respond then? Do we

work on our breathing and do a quick meditation? We all have tests like this to see how much faith we have."

The Yoga Lifestyle center employs, besides Butera, five part-time teachers. Classes are also held off-site at businesses and schools.

Last school year, the athletic director of Great Valley High School asked the Yoga Lifestyle Center to conduct stress management classes using yoga.

Currently, Butera teaches one yoga class to each of the summer camps offered at the Phoenixville Area YMCA.

He and his staff also have given after-work stress management yoga classes at SMS Corporation.

Butera was initially attracted to Phoenixville because of its accessibility. He conducted several classes at sites as far flung as

Norristown and Pottstown, and so Phoenixville was a happy medium.

While Butera has an impressive teaching resume, he admits running a business was new to him.

"It's been a big test for me. I'm constantly learning new things," he said.

He says focusing on advertising is more vital to any small business than he previously thought.

That, and presentation.

He's added flowerboxes to the store's entrance and will have the classroom and bookstore/lobby painted using a lazure method of gentle pastel colors.

Two classes will be offered at 12:30 to 2 p.m. and 2 to 3:30 p.m. Pre-registration is required for the free classes and can be done by calling (610) 933-3400.