

Pilates: Helping busy women keep fit



Written by Eren Gökner - Special to the Town Crier

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Photo Eren Gknar/Special To The Town Crier Los Altos residents Kenna Fenton, front, and Sangeeta Luthra attend Michelle Melendez' Pilates Cardiocamp.

At the end of her hour-long Pilates Cardiocamp workout, instructor Michelle Melendez finishes with yoga poses and stretches – and a lot of encouragement.

She tells the women in her class, held at Christ Episcopal Church, 1040 Border Road in Los Altos, to pat themselves on the back. They had been there since 9:10 a.m., having dropped off children at school or babysitters and plowed through chores for a little “me” time. And Melendez won't let them forget it.

“So many women won't even consider a workout, and this is an amazing workout,” she said.

The Pilates method is harder than it looks – don't let those tiny dumbbells fool you.

Pilates, developed by German Joseph Pilates in 1883, uses controlled movement to strengthen the core abdominal muscles and back posture. Melendez adds cardio movements to reduce weight and help women get fit. While she has never struggled with excess pounds, her mother has, and she learned from her experiences.

Melendez strives to create a supportive atmosphere among class members.

“This is a family – we all know about each other,” she said. “I've gone to weddings and funerals (for people in the class). We even have Christmas parties.”

Melendez also teaches classes 6 a.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at the American Legion Hall at 347 First St. in Los Altos. Her early-morning sessions are popular because people can work out before work. There's also a Palo Alto cardiocamp, held outdoors.

Melendez said she “fell into Pilates.” She majored in communications at San Jose State but just needed a job. Since then, she’s accrued 10 trainer credentials, including Pilates coach, senior balance and spin. She led boot camps at Foothill College and Stanford University, and founded her own Pilates fitness cardiocamp in 2001.

Melendez also does personal training, and she stresses that women in particular need to remain fit as they age.

“If you want to get out of the car, lift your own grocery bags into the shopping cart, if you want to get off the toilet seat by yourself when you’re 80, you have to do this,” she said. “If you don’t strength train, by age 80 you could have a quarter of the muscle mass you had at age 40.”

Melendez said many senior women who become sedentary have difficulty standing up straight.

“They’re too stiff, the joints in the knees won’t move, the blood can’t move,” she said. “People get to the point that they can barely walk, and it’s not because they can’t walk.”

If she had to choose between strength training and cardio, she said she would choose strength training hands down.

“Having more muscle mass as you age is going to keep you doing the things you love,” she said. “This is another reason I love teaching my program.”

Los Altos resident Kenna Fenton has attended the Pilates Cardiocamp at Christ Episcopal for two years. Like other participants, she heard about the class through friends who had taken it. Since she started taking Pilates, she said she’s lost weight and strengthened her core.

The difference is noticeable. Fenton said her mother told her she now looks like she did in high school. At 55, Fenton said, she now feels more active and younger than she did before.

Arezou Bahman of Los Altos, whose children are 4 and 8, manages to find the time to attend the Pilates camp.

“I love it,” she said. “It makes me feel real good – a lot stronger.”

Melendez’s classes range from \$180 to \$240 for five-week sessions. Drop-ins are \$20.

For more information, visit www.womengettingfit.com.

9 Comments

"Trainer"

1

by **Michelle**

at Thursday, 23 February 2012 16:21

I love teaching this program! Thank you Town Crier for publishing this story!

Warmly,

Michelle Melendez

Expert Fitness Trainer

"student"

2

by **Betty**

at Thursday, 23 February 2012 16:22

Michelle's classes are incredible. I've been doing them for 7 years now, and I will never give them up. Michelle changes up the routine every day, so that we work out every possible muscle group, and we never get bored. She also knows a ton about how bodies work, so she helps us avoid injuries and gives us easier exercises, if we need them. I highly recommend Michelle's bootcamp.

"\\"Early Morning Faithful\\"

3

by **Carol**

at Friday, 24 February 2012 09:13

I can't think of a better way to spend each morning than to start the day with Michelle and her class. Michelle provides us with personalized training and is constantly bringing new exercises to keep it fresh. She combines pilates with cardio workouts and strength training. Michelle is energetic and enthusiastic about teaching and making sure that everyone is enjoying the benefits of all her program has to offer. What a great way to start the day!!!

"RN"

4

by **Olivia Abrams**

at Friday, 24 February 2012 09:13

Michelle is amazing! I started taking her classes last year. Her

curriculum works the entire body and is for any age group. I felt a significant and visible difference in my body structure with her resistance training. She also came to speak and teach over 40 Sister Missionaries who don't get too much time to exercise. They were so pumped up at what they learned and have been enjoying their 30 minute workouts each morning. She gave an informative lecture on the body, muscle groups, and how nutrition plays an important role in taking care of the only body we have. Michelle is energetic, respectful, and very knowledgeable in her field. All I can add is come out and try her class for yourself...Love your body

"Retired"

5

by **Alice Frost**

at Friday, 24 February 2012 09:14

My husband, Bob and I (both in upper 70's) have attended Michelle's classes for about 8 years. We found after an hour in the early morning, of exercises that strengthen our core, working with weights on our arm muscles, focus on balance and exercises that had us breathing deeply, our bodies were warmed up and ready for the day ahead! Michelle also made the exercising fun with "name your favorite" animal, holiday, or other topics, while we did timed stretches, body planks, wall squats etc.

"Instructor"

6

by **Sasha**

at Friday, 24 February 2012 09:15

This program goes far beyond any exercise programs out there. It is indeed a family. I joined early morning classes in November 2011 and feel like I've been part of the program forever.

Michelle's method is all-encompassing and effective. By now I started to notice how people, who just finished their first 5-week session are getting stronger with every class. Their posture improves, their technique gets better.

I love being in this program!!! Thank you, Michelle!

Comment

7

by **Gigi Godfrey**

at Friday, 24 February 2012 09:15
