

MANTRA



core, cardio, balance and flexibility in one 50-minute workout

I've played tennis several times a week for over 40 years. It's been my main form of exercise as long as I remember. So, then why do I still have a spare tire around the middle and my physique looks less like Charles Atlas and more like a bowling pin with a bad hairpiece.

My doctor recently said, "We don't play tennis to get in shape, we get in shape to play tennis." He must be right, despite all the singles I play, I still get winded jogging to the cookie cupboard.

A friend of mine called me a few months ago and said a friend of hers just moved back from Southern California to open a new fitness studio. She said it was the first of its kind on the Gulf Coast of Florida.

Mantra is the local affiliate of "Lagree Fitness," a revolutionary approach to getting in shape in a short period of time. It actually combines core, cardio, balance and flexibility in one 50 minute work-out.

The original studio is in West Hollywood, California and is a favorite of celebrities like Brooke Burke, Nicole Kidman and Ben Stiller. Studios have since opened in New York, Boston, Chicago, Dallas and many other metropolitan cities.

Kathy Maloy is from Sarasota and couldn't wait to bring the fabulous workout back from Southern California to her hometown. Maloy says she got addicted after the first time she took the class and began going three times a week.

"I instantly felt more toned and began feeling so much stronger. I love seeing others become as passionate about this as I am," she says.

With improved balance and flexibility she found she was better at sports all around. "My skiing, running, and horseback riding all improved. I had a new-found energy and it carried over into everything I did."

Classes are led by Certified Lagree Fitness instructors. They take students through a series of Pilates- inspired movements on sleek black machines called the Megaformer.

Some call it "Pilates on steroids." The goal is to keep the heart rate elevated the entire workout, burning fat and building muscle all at the same time.

Within these different moves, I realize I'm doing push ups, situps and stretches. I looked at the clock a short time after I came in, and 45 minutes had already passed. I had a full work-out and barely realized it!

Dozens of people go every day to the modern studio with the "Tribeca loft" feeling. (It's across the driveway from Sonny's Barbecue on Tamiami Trail, just south of Bee Ridge Road.) There is space for 11 students per class, and there are several classes per day. You can sign-up and pay on line—so when you arrive you can hit the ground running.

Classes have become a hit with both men and women. Even entire families find themselves enjoying the workout together. Friends and family can workout side by side, each on their own state of the art Megaformer.

The morning after my first work out, I was amazed how sore I was. I thought all the tennis I played would prevent that from happening. Not even close. I'm finally breaking new ground.

I'll always love tennis, but it's just not enough. RAY COLLINS

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