

By Martin Lenkowski

WHAT IS PILATES?

and what can it do for you?



Exercise has never been one of Parkland resident Mindy Guss' favorite things, that is until this year.

"I hate to exercise, but I can't miss this," she says, after having just finished a private session at Laura's Ultimate Pilates in Parkland. Guss has been taking Pilates since January.

With Al Green's classic R&B tune *Let's Stay Together*, playing mostly unnoticed in the background, owner Laura Simoncini tells her student, who's exercising on the tower, a piece of equipment unique to Pilates, "now for the next five have that left hand behind your head."

Simoncini, a Bayside, N.Y. native, has been involved in various forms of exercise and fitness training for more than 20 years. About ten years ago, she discovered Pilates and realized its uniqueness and advantages compared to other forms of exercise. "Because Pilates is extremely different," she explains, "this is truly the 'fountain of youth' for the body. This works the body as a whole unit, with every single part of the body completely challenged."

At one point, the instructor uses her own super slim and trim body to demonstrate a leg stretching exercise on another piece of Pilates equipment. Simoncini, herself a former dancer and gymnast who teaches both private and class sessions daily, has absolutely no body fat visible on her small physique. But don't let looks deceive you. "I'm very thin, but I'm extremely strong," she reveals.

Simoncini clarifies that Pilates works outward from the body's core, or center. "When that gets strong, your whole body gets strong," she declares.

Pilates is beneficial for people of all ages, and her current clientele ranges in age from nine to 82. "A lot of the boys come to improve their baseball and soccer games," she conveys. "A lot of girls are dancers, gymnasts and even ice-skaters. We have a lot of equestrians, because Pilates helps them with their riding skills. Men swear it helps improve their golf game."

Pilates is designed to elongate one's body. "This is done on string resistance," Simoncini points out. "Pilates doesn't bulk you up, but gets you longer and leaner muscles." She then demonstrates the tower's string mechanism.

German-born Joseph Pilates developed the Pilates system of exercise early last century as an art of 'controlled' movements.

He moved to the United States where he further developed and taught his system. Pictures of Joseph Pilates, alongside some of his original equipment, adorn the walls in Simoncini's studio.

"Pilates works the body from the inside out," conveys Simoncini. "Traditional workouts will work the outside - only the superficial muscles."

She touts the other advantages of Pilates. "You will stand up taller," Simoncini adds. "Posture will improve after the first visit." She disclosed that many of today's youngsters already have very poor posture from being slouched over their computers all day, and they could benefit highly from Pilates.

"Pilates is a work in progress," Simoncini continues. "Everything will flow and feel better. You will also improve your eating and feel lots of energy and exhilaration. We work a lot with breathing."

The art of Pilates has its mental benefits as well. "When people come here, they're in the moment," according to her. "At that hour, they are at complete peace with themselves. There are very few times you can be like that."

Simoncini has five instructors working for her. "And they're all top of the line," she exclaims.

Simoncini herself reaps the many benefits of the Pilates system. "I'm very fast-paced, and Pilates calms me down," she declares, in her rapid New York-style speak. 🗨️

