



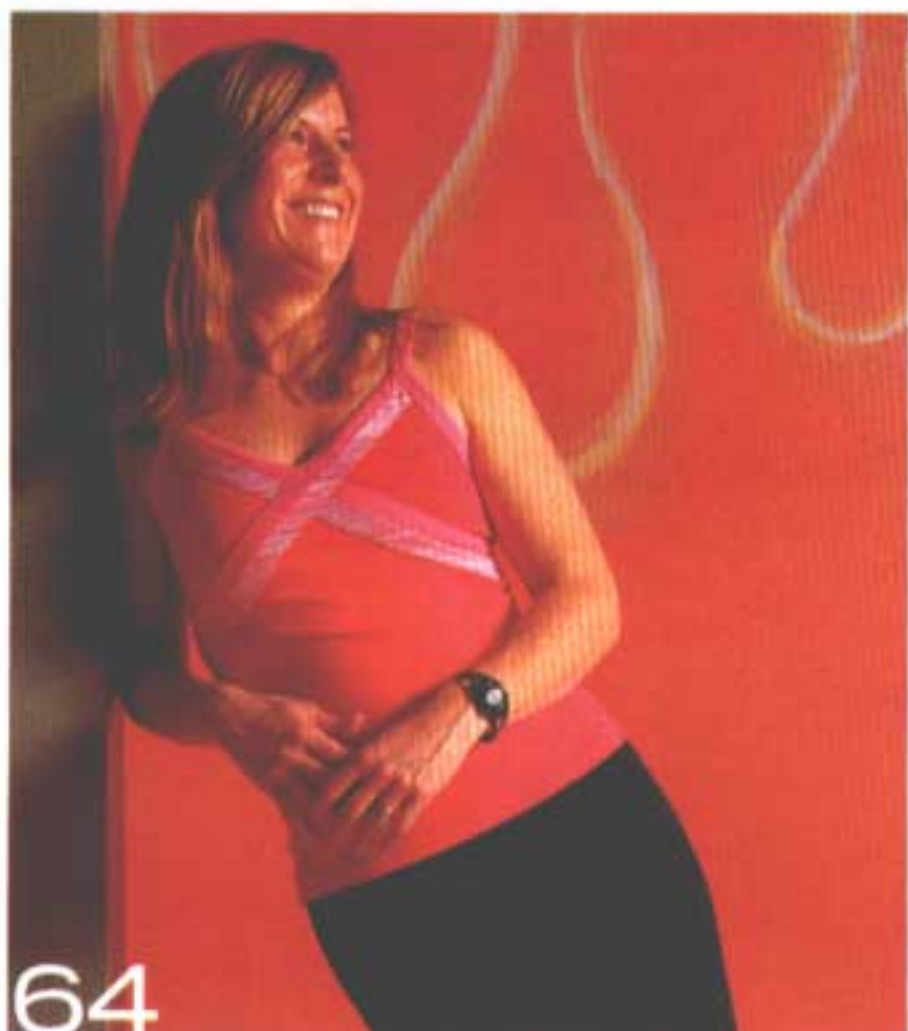
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On the cover: Elizabeth Gouveia of Greece, a colorist at Scott Miller Salon and Spa, is a ballroom and Latin dance enthusiast who has won competitions dancing with her husband. Dress is from Dado Boutique on Park Avenue in Rochester. Hair by Myá Bonnette and makeup by Cori Palazzolo, both of Scott Miller Salon. Photo by Matt Wittmeyer. On this page: Manhattan Square Park—photo by Carlos Ortiz. Banana Xango from Tapas 177 and yoga instructor Jennifer Hess—photos by Matt Wittmeyer.

# Yoga with the youngins

Families get on  
the mat together  
for a new twist on  
traditional poses.



(At left) Heidi Kaufman, founder of Peacefull Kids Yoga, shows a pose to Jack Kaczorowski, 3, of Pittsford and Nathan Duffy, 5, of Rochester in her Pittsford studio. (At right) Jennifer Hess, a former aerobics instructor and now a triathlete, teaches yoga for kids as a way to promote wellness and self-esteem.

by Nancy O'Donnell

By now, the benefits of yoga are well known—an estimated 30 million people in the United States practice the ancient Eastern discipline of exercise and meditation. But these days, more and more of those people are children, as young as six weeks old.

Do toddling toddlers stay put on the mat? Does a cleansing breath actually calm restless children? And can yoga bring families closer together?

We checked in with several local practitioners to find out. Hold onto your mats for everything from the “Taking out the trash” pose to circus yoga.

### Calming kids

Jennifer Hess went to KarmaKids in New York City to get certified in yoga and has been touting the benefits of starting young ever since.

“In my Baby and Moms Yoga, the babies get a lot of attention—massaging and stretching,” says Hess, who has taught yoga at Midtown Athletic Club and the Jewish Community Center. “Their faces light up. They coo and laugh.”

Mothers in her classes have told her their babies’ digestive systems seem to work better as a result, and some even sleep more soundly. Hess says it’s similar to an adult doing a twisting pose. “They’re detoxifying their bodies,” she explains. “It helps with their digestion.”

But “it’s important to make traditional yoga poses more accessible to kids, more playful,” says Hess, whose own children are 6

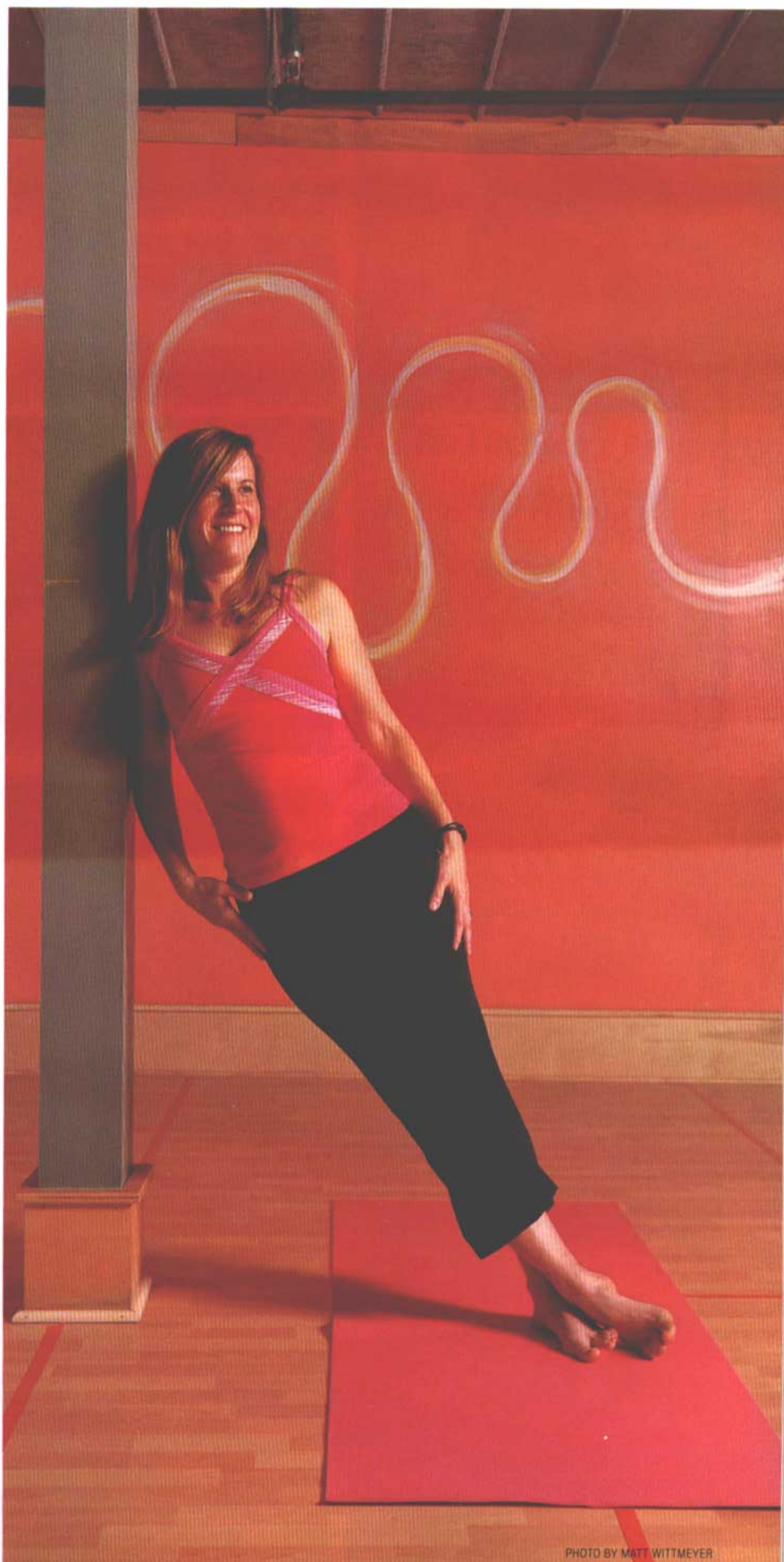


PHOTO BY MATT WITTMAYER



PHOTOS BY CARLOS ORTIZ

"It helps families connect, to improve physical expression through using the body."

— Vanessa Brown

and 10. "We squat and swing our arms and incorporate noises. In 'downward-facing dog', we bark and play 'Who let the dogs out.'"

With older children, Hess tries to incorporate lessons in how "not to focus on the negative." To help, she'll use a piece of candy and have them focus on the sweetness, or place a teddy bear on their bellies to help them concentrate on their breathing, guiding them to calmness.

It's not as easy as it sounds. Cyndi Weiss, owner of Breathe Yoga, gave up on children's classes early on in her practice when they "turned into gym time." But now, with an expanded space on Pittsford's Main Street and with Hess on board, Weiss is ready to bring children back into the studio starting in January.

"We've waited to start and now we're going to add fun, imaginative classes for kids," Weiss says. "People are surprised that kids can be comfortable being still. There's lots of movement, but yet they can be still."

Classes at Breathe will include prenatal yoga, 'Moms & Babies' and sessions for pre-K and ages 5 to 7 and 8 to 10. And you can book a yoga birthday

party combining yoga poses, creative breathing techniques and healthy snacks.

### Flying family

Vanessa and Errett Brown, owners of Balanced Body Massage & Yoga in Honeoye Falls, bring kids' yoga into the big tent through Circus Yoga. The practice was created in 1997 by Kevin O'Keefe, a yoga teacher and founder of Circus Minimus and the American Youth Circus Organization.

"Unlike yoga, which is individual, Circus Yoga children work together," Vanessa Brown explains. "It combines two ancient traditions: the consciousness of yoga with the community of the circus."

Circus aspects can range from juggling and clowning to tight wire and balance. "Basically you join the circus skills of fun and celebration while incorporating the focus that you find in yoga," Brown says.

For over a decade, her husband, Errett, taught Iyengar Hatha yoga classes while Vanessa worked as a massage therapist in the studio. But during a Circus Yoga workshop they attended, the couple and their two children, Lila and Phoenix, played games and tried out "flying yoga" (a parent lies on his or her back while the child is poised above on extended legs. It was enough to persuade them to join the circus movement.

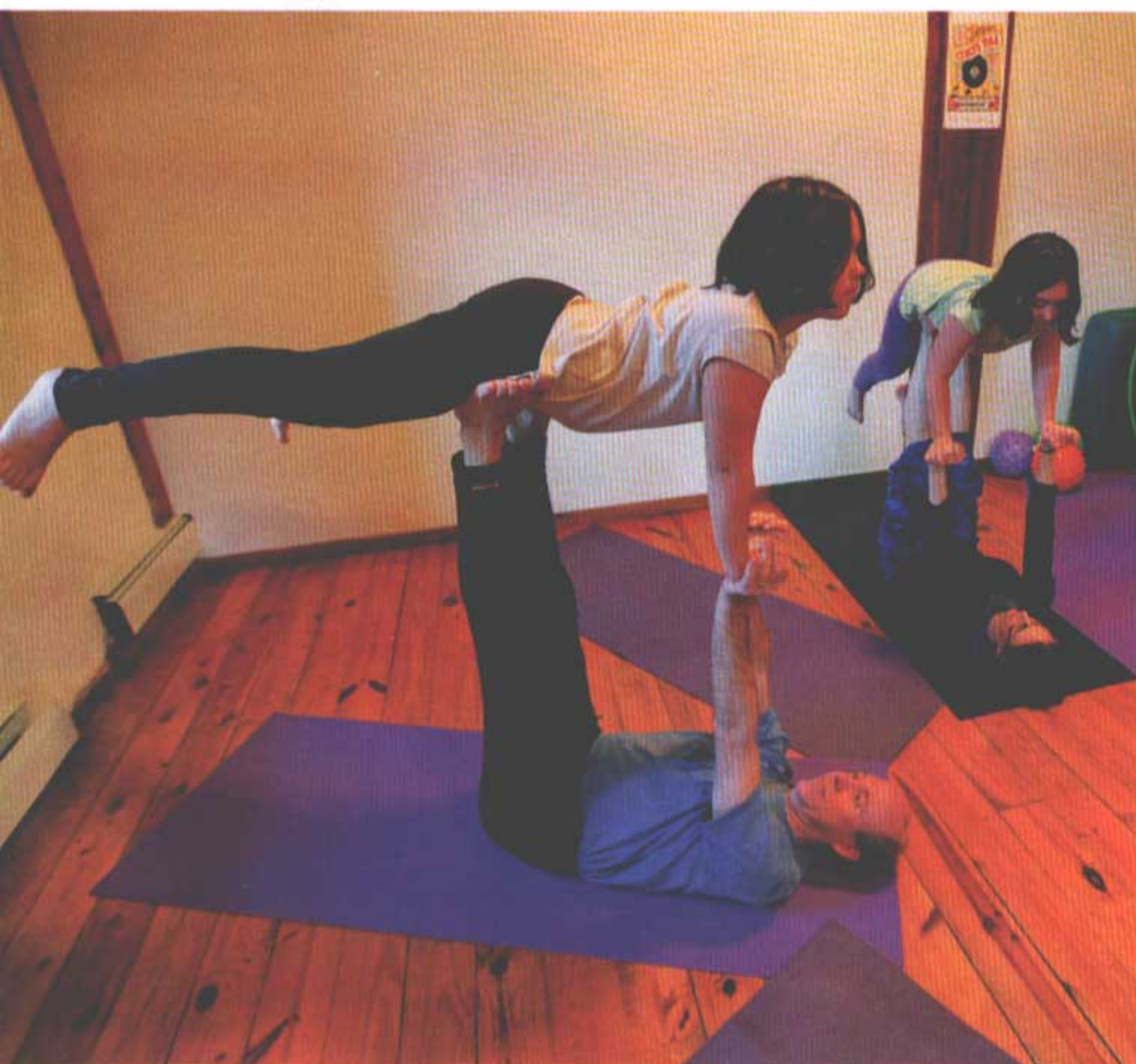
Such acrobatic poses "build trust, the ability to risk," Brown says. "It also teaches social skills. In some cases, parents have difficulty communicating with their kids. It helps families connect, to improve physical expression through using the body."

Classes include ages 3 to 6 (parents welcome), Kids Circus Yoga and Family Circus Yoga (ages 7 and up).

### Little teachers

Heidi Kaufman's Peacefull Kids yoga practice in Pittsford has athletic roots. After running in marathons in New York City and Washington, D.C., she was looking for an exercise that would "add more longevity and flexibility" to her regimen. After practicing with various yoga teachers in the area, she decided it was more than a means to future marathons.

"I thought, 'I'm getting so much from of yoga, it could help my children,'" says Kaufman, a single mother raising four children. "I held my very first class in my living room." For pupils, she recruited



(At top) Vanessa Brown and daughter Lila, 8, warm up during Circus Kids Yoga class at Balanced Body Massage & Yoga. (Below) Errett and Vanessa Brown hold Lyra Feasey, 8 (left), and Claire Feasey, 10.



PHOTOS BY MATT WITTMAYER

With yoga, instructors can get right down at kid level. Here, Heidi Kaufman of Peacefull Kids Yoga sees eye-to-eye with students Daisy Marvin, 6, of Brighton (above) and Micky Fitzpatrick, 5, of Irondequoit (right).



children from her neighborhood.

Later, Kaufman studied with YogaKids International and taught at Blue Lotus Yoga in Pittsford. She has brought yoga into schools, including French Road Elementary School in Brighton, the Montessori School of Rochester and School #34 on Lexington Avenue. In January 2009, she opened Peacefull Kids Yoga.

"What's great is that kids become the teacher," Kaufman says. "A mom told me that she was at home and her kids were getting wild; she was about to lose it. Then her daughter said to her, 'Mom, let's take a take-five breath.'"

Today, her children help in classes that include Parent and Babies (6 weeks to "beginning crawlers"), Little Yogis (ages 3 to 5) YogaKids (6 to 11 years) and Tween/Teen & Parent (11 & up).

In some of the classes, the children know it's all about them. Along with traditionally named poses such as dog, fish and tree are kid-approved monikers like "Taking out the Trash" and "Because I Said So." Except in yoga class, those phrases make them smile.

*Nancy O'Donnell is a frequent contributor to Rochester Magazine.*

## Kids and family yoga

- **Peacefull Kids Yoga**, 2851 Clover St., Pittsford. 200-2780, [www.peacefullkids.com](http://www.peacefullkids.com).
- **Jennifer Hess**, [www.karmaspotkids.com](http://www.karmaspotkids.com) (for her blog). 746-2674.
- **Balanced Body Massage & Yoga**, 61 N. Main St., Honeoye Falls. 261-4748, [www.bbmaya.com](http://www.bbmaya.com).
- **Breathe**, 19 S. Main St., Pittsford. 248-9070, [www.breatheyoga.com](http://www.breatheyoga.com).
- **Beyond Center for Yoga and Pilates**, 67 Main St., Brockport. 259-4633, [www.beyondsm.com](http://www.beyondsm.com).

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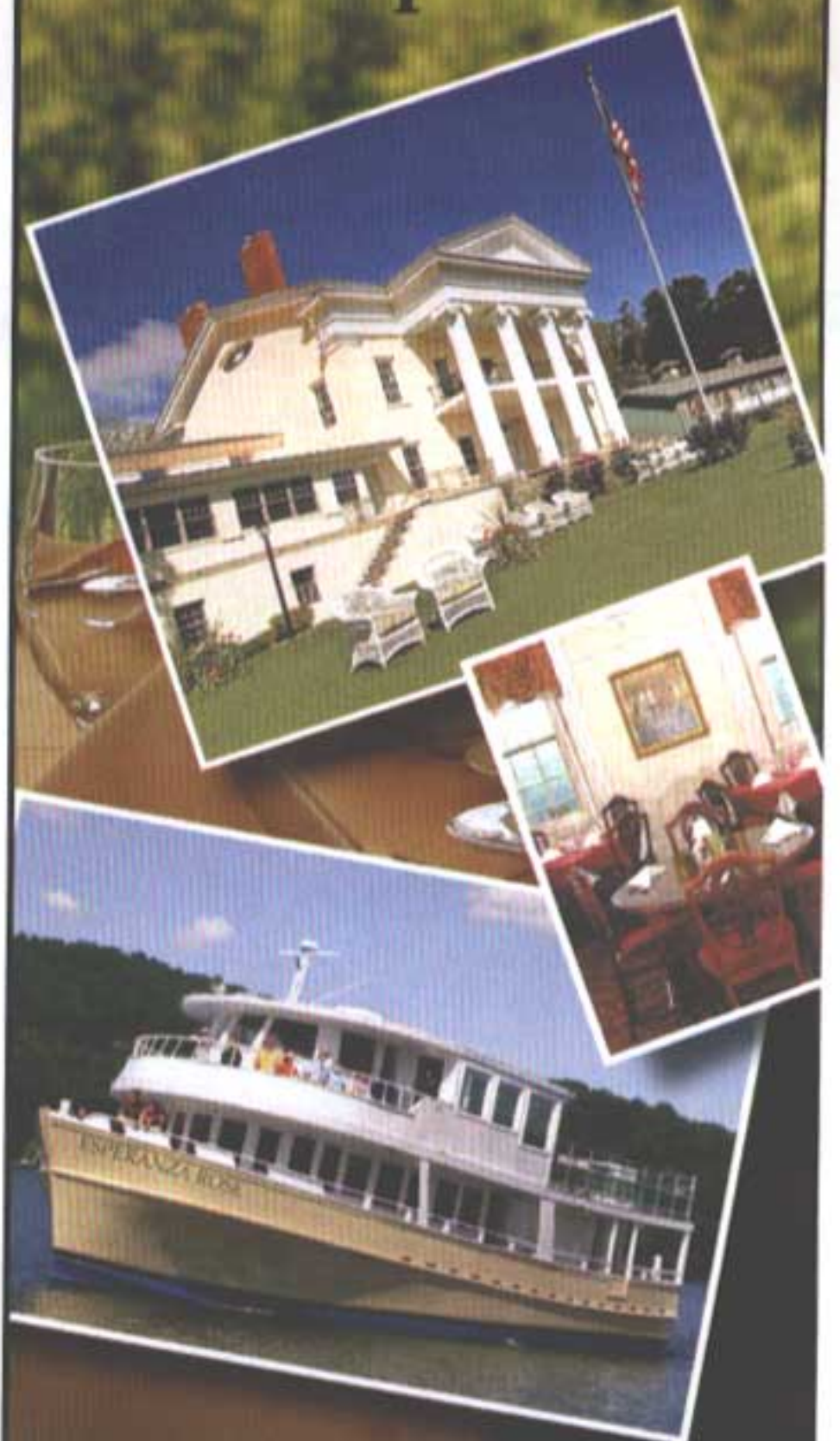
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