

Pilates power

As Pilates becomes more popular, instructors are trying to preserve the original method

BY ANDY TAYLOR-FABE
Record-Eagle staff writer

Imagine getting members of various religious denominations together and trying to get them to standardize their beliefs, terminology and practices.

The challenges faced by followers of Joseph Pilates — the man who invented the now-popular method of body conditioning — are not quite as dramatic as a religious crisis. But Pilates instructor and physical therapist Kathy Baylis-Baker, owner of the Center for Body Awareness Pilates Studio in Traverse City, said ironing out inconsistencies in the Pilates world is confusing for customers and practitioners.

Joseph Pilates started practicing and teaching his method, focusing on the strength of the body's "core" (from shoulders to hips), breathing and flexibility, during World War I. But over the past few decades, his followers have branched out and developed their own styles, Baylis-Baker said.

"Now they're trying to get together and standardize," she said.

The Pilates Method Alliance, a Miami, Fla., based organization, is the closest thing Pilates has to a governing body.

"It's just in its infancy," Baylis-Baker said, referring to the PMA's attempts to standardize names and techniques.

People interested in Pilates can also be confused by the variety of different exercises that incorporate Pilates techniques.

While "Pilates-based exercise" can be extremely helpful in strength and sports training, Baylis-Baker said, it cannot technically be called Pilates if it merely incorporates certain elements of the method, such as breathing techniques.

The other problem facing Pilates organizations is the lack of universal certification.

"Not all classes are created equally ... You have to see how long (instructors) took classes before they started



Record-Eagle/Keith King

ABove, Kathy Baylis-Baker (background) performs pilates moves with instructor Jennifer Turner, at Center for Body Awareness Pilates Studio in Traverse City. Below, Turner works on a machine that uses springs to assist Pilates moves.

teaching," Baylis-Baker said, adding that some of the exercises can be dangerous if performed or monitored improperly, especially if being practiced by someone with a previous back or neck injury.

Pilates was originally practiced by dancers starting as early as the '30s, Baylis-Baker said.

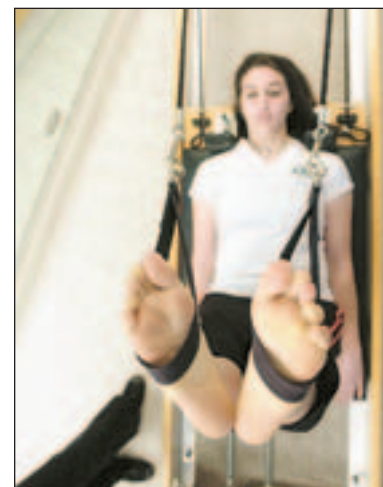
"Then it hits Hollywood and it's 'I just had my baby and look how good I look,'" she added.

What is Pilates?

Pilates combines the philosophies of yoga and calisthenics, Baylis-Baker said.

"Pilates is a lot more focused on strength than yoga," she said. "It's about your core," the area of your body between your shoulders to your hips, also known as the trunk.

Jennifer Turner, 22, a dancer and instructor at the Pilates Studio, said Pilates is "a choreographed flow of exercise" similar to yoga but more focused on strength.



Pilates trivia

- ▶ Joseph Pilates started teaching his unique form of exercise during World War I while in an internment camp with other Germans in England.
- ▶ Celebrities who practice Pilates include Madonna and Julia Roberts.
- ▶ Joseph Pilates' apprentices sometimes worked with him for three years before teaching others.

Sources: *The Pilates Method Alliance* and *the Center for Body Awareness Pilates Studio in Traverse City*

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