

Spiritual workout

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Business Journal photo by JAMES H. KARALES

Stress shakedown

Belly dancing is a holistic workout for the mind, body and spirit

By ELIZABETH HLOTYAK

To give a break to overworked minds, bodies and spirits, the corporate world has embraced some new ways to combat the daily stresses of life. According to the Wellness Council of America, more than 80 percent of U.S. businesses with 50 or more employees offer some sort of health promotion package, the most popular being exercise, smoking cessation, back care and stress management.

Across the country, more than 50 percent of companies with at least 1,000 employees have their own fitness facility on site and a large number of companies offer alternative area fitness programs.

One health trend that women in the corporate world have welcomed is belly dancing. The fitness centers at Pepsi-Cola in Somers and Purchase, N.Y., are offering their employees this alternative fitness method to shake off the winter doldrums, some excess pounds and stress.

"I would say that 95 percent of the women in my classes are professional women and this gives them a chance to work out," said Zohar, a professional belly dancer from Mount Kisco, N.Y., who teaches classes in Bedford, N.Y., at The Center for Yoga & Movement and on-site for Pepsi-Cola. "The meditative quality is very relaxing."

Belly dancing is a holistic workout for the mind, body and spirit. The dance honors the four elements — earth, water, fire and the changing phases of the moon. It utilizes movement and shapes in the form of spirals, undulations, shimmies, figure 8s, circles and crescents. It has inspired many women to don jingly hip belts and jangly finger cymbals.

"Belly dancing couldn't be farther from what I do for a living," said Shari Morwood, a student in Zohar's class and the director of market intelligence for International Business Machines Corp. "In the business world, I create a plan and then work that plan. In dance class, it's about improvisation, feeling, creativity, letting go, unlearning rigidity... This has made me less anxious at work as I've come to view work and life as a piece of music or dance."

Zohar, who is also a performing artist and has her own entertainment company called Zohar Entertainment Inc. in Katonah, N.Y., said that this alternative trend has become more popular through the years and that the numbers of students in her classes have risen dramatically.

