

Yoga teacher offers Howard Park classes for those seeking gentle form of exercise

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If you're looking for yoga classes that are affordable, accessible and not too difficult, the community center at Howard Park might be the place for you.

Jerry Jefferson, a West Palm Beach parks and rec department employee who teaches the classes through his private fitness business, says his yoga sessions at the city-run park provide the same level of instruction one would get at a gym or yoga studio, where memberships and class fees can drive up the cost.



Amanda Voisard/The Post

Jerry Jefferson teaches a yoga class at Howard Park Community Center. The eight-week class meets once a week and helps relieve stress and build flexibility.

"This is my way of giving back to the community," said Jefferson, who runs his classes in eight-week sessions that cost \$80 for West Palm residents and \$96 for everyone else. "We thought it would be great to offer yoga at a price everyone can afford. And we get a chance to share something we really love."

Jefferson teaches a style of yoga called kripalu, which is a gentle, mindful style of yoga. He said the hourlong class is good for anyone interested in keeping fit, but it's especially good for those rehabilitating from injuries.

"At Howard Park, we offer a local program that's accessible to any citizen, regardless of age or flexibility, despite any fitness level," said Jefferson, a

West Palm Beach resident who's been teaching yoga since 1999. "Anybody can accomplish any fitness goal they have through yoga. If they come here, they'll find a comfortable place to do yoga with other people who are trying to change their body. As they change their body, they'll find that their lives begin to change also."

Jefferson and his business partner, Therese Abair, founded Living Fit Today, a business that teaches Pilates, yoga, aerobics and other workouts in various locations throughout Palm Beach County. The company also hosts CityFit TV on the city's WPB TV-Channel 18.

Although he teaches in many places, Jefferson said his classes at Howard Park are especially rewarding. Each session usually has about 15 students. The next session begins Nov. 1.

Abair agrees that the Howard Park classes are special.

"A lot of people like a park atmosphere. It creates a sense of community," she said. "I've been to a lot of classes where you come in and out and the teacher doesn't even recognize you and the others students don't greet you."

But Jefferson's class, which meets Thursdays, isn't one of them. She noted that Jefferson creates a friendly environment in his classes.

"Everyone feels like part of the group," Abair said. "He brings a sense of community within the class. You never feel like an outsider."

West Palm Beach resident Berrie Radanovich agreed.

"It's my most peaceful hour of the week," said Radanovich, who has been taking the class for more than a year. "As a mom, it's my favorite night of the week to just relax for an hour. It's also a good time to meet with other mothers."

Radanovich said the class is a great way for people who are interested in yoga to try it without damaging their pocketbooks.

"If people haven't tried yoga, this is a great way to try with little risk," Radanovich said. "To get his level of expertise at the community center at a rate that's really affordable is unique. He's offering a service, something that people really want, and this is a way for us to afford it."

Jefferson said he doesn't focus on the spiritual side of yoga in his classes at the park, but acknowledged that it has the power to profoundly influence people's lives.

"I keep my own spiritual views to myself," Jefferson said. "It can be spiritual if you choose to make it that way. I don't do it in the park because I don't think it's the right forum for it."

"Even if it doesn't change one person's life, it may make them nicer to others and help others. It's great to change people's lives. That's one of the reasons I got into teaching in the first place."