

Business

# The Transformation of Star Pilates

By Sophie Braccini



Andrea Ruotsi teaches a barre class.

Star Pilates and Fitness in Moraga is undergoing a complete transformation under the new leadership of Andrea Ruotsi. The young mother lives in Moraga with her 5-year-old son, Oliver, and has the energy, training and business sense to make the studio a big success. She is adding classes and services that cater to a clientele who are looking for fun and stimulation in a casual atmosphere. Definitely not your average suburbanite, Ruotsi also has an interior design practice.

Ruotsi's business goals for Star Pilates are lofty: adding barre, yoga, TRX and spin classes, while providing morning childcare, making sure that the relaxed atmosphere is preserved, and the existing clients who come for Reformer or Pilates Mat classes don't feel pushed out of the way.

"I bought the studio last November," she says with a big smile. "I thought that this place had a lot of potential for development." Ruotsi was raised in Alamo and has lived in many different places in the United States including Reno, where she got her interior design degree, as well as New York and Los Angeles where she worked in the design industry. She came back to the Bay Area when she decided to start a family. Throughout her life, Ruotsi was athletic, participating in soccer, track and a lot of skiing. She started teaching fitness classes in high school as an extension of her summer job as a lifeguard at Livorna pool in Alamo. She's continued teaching fitness in tandem with her interior design career, steadily building her body of knowledge and experience.

"I loved teaching so much that I always knew someday I would have my own place," Ruotsi says. "I love barre classes but I didn't want to own a barre franchise, with someone limiting what I can do. I think that the healthiest thing for everyone's body

is to mix different exercises." She started teaching barre over 10 years ago, first in Marin County, then San Francisco, before coming back to the East Bay two and a half years ago. "If someone comes to my class regularly three times a week, I guarantee that person will transform their body within three months," she says.

The expansion of classes and services started at Star Pilates are all with the goal to better serve the needs of her clientele, such as opening the morning daycare that runs during the week or selling a selection of sports attire.

On the business side, she has partnered with her family. Her father is the behind-the-scenes finance officer of the company. "He was an executive and is now retired. This business endeavor is his way of fulfilling his dream of having a business, vicariously through me, and we've become very close in the process," she says. Ruotsi has always had a business ac-

men. Even when she was working for Anthropology in Los Angeles creating displays, besides the esthetics, she also had the drive to grow the business. "I would walk my stock room every morning and see what I owned a lot of," she remembers, "and then I would create displays around those units."

With Star Pilates, her goal is to make her space in the Moraga Center more visible. One of her first changes was the barre room that had no natural light and felt like a storage area. She removed the panels masking the very large windows, replaced the carpet with wood, and installed mirrors as well as beautiful red oak bars with custom-made stainless steel brackets.

Ruotsi's goal is to offer between five to eight different fitness classes a day. She won't touch the main lobby where the Reformer classes are located and she is continuing to employ the master teachers who are the foundation of Star Pilates. "I don't want to disrupt the existing classes; I don't want to lose the intimacy of the business, either," she says. "I'm not looking to pack the seams."

Ruotsi now offers a Sunday yoga class and is looking for more yoga instructors to offer power yoga. She also wants to add space to have a dedicated spin room and possibly locker and shower rooms.

Ruotsi continues to run Flutter Interiors, her design business. That, coupled with raising her son, makes for a very full and busy life indeed.

Information about classes is available online at [www.starpilatesandfitness.com](http://www.starpilatesandfitness.com).

Star Pilates and Fitness  
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## Orinda's In Forma Integral Fitness Celebrates 20 Years

Andrea Colomбу started In Forma in 1995, starting with the idea of blending Eastern and Western approaches to fitness. The Italian man, who had been involved in semi-professional sports in his country, moved to California in 1986. In 1988 he went back to college to study anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, exercise science and nutrition. In 1990, he started his personal training career (AFAA & ACE certified), earned a certification in massage therapy from the McKinnon Institute and started his private practice. "We expanded the studio twice, doubling its size to offer all of our classes," says Colomбу. "We offer pilates, barre, yoga, strength and cardio classes, nutrition and TRX." Colomбу's ambition is to offer tools and practices for both the body and the mind. He went back to school in 2003 for a psychology degree and has made his meditation practice a big part of his life. "I started teaching meditation in the yoga studio in 2014," he says. Some of his clients have been with him for the past 20 years and new ones come in all the time, ranging in age from 13 to 93 years old. He says that he's seen a shift in what people demand over the last 20 years. "The awareness has increased, people want to live healthy lives, and they also want a meaningful lifestyle." In Forma also holds a Parkinson's working group (Colomбу's mom had Parkinson's) with a specialized trainer. In Forma is located at 23A Orinda Way, Orinda. For info, call (925) 254-6877 or visit [www.informaorinda.com](http://www.informaorinda.com).

from front page

## The Lamorinda Woman Behind Champion Dogs

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Judie Howard works with her dogs on differing commands. Photo Andy Scheck

After Howard won her first Utility title – an American Kennel Club advanced obedience trial category – with her first two dogs, she felt confident enough to start her own training school in Moraga in 1974. "We first used the tennis courts at Campolindo, then the gym," she remembers. She

trained at Acalanes High School, Del Valle High School and Saint Mary's College. Soon word spread about her training. "At some point we trained 350 dogs a week," she remembers. She had Novice classes that she ran with the help of one assistant for every four dogs, and had as much as

45 dogs at a time. "Within 15 minutes we could get every one of them to sit and not bark," she remembers.

Howard focuses on praise. "I'm very consistent, I am lavish with praise, and I set very clear boundaries," she says. "I don't punish, and when I raise the level of difficulty I explain to the dogs why I do it."

With the help of her husband, Gary Howard, she built her own training site on her property 20 years ago. "Training is very good for the dogs, both physically and mentally," says Debbie Hughes of Moraga, who's been working with Howard for two years. She brings her Papillon Remy for one-on-one training because he is very shy. "He was afraid of the

## business briefs

Carefree Moves Celebrated

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Photo provided

Carefree Moves was recently recognized by Score (Service Corps of Retired Executives, an affiliate of the Small Business Administration) and nominated for an honorable mention as Outstanding Small Business Owned by Women. Since the two owners Dee Vance and Cynthia Nolan purchased the Lafayette-based business in 2009, it has been growing steadily. They say word-of-mouth is the reason for their success. They remove all the stress from moving and tailor their service to their clients' needs, from simple packing and unpacking help, to hand-holding throughout the moving process. "We work with all kinds of clients," says Vance, "from busy families, to people downsizing." Vance adds that their bigger assets are the 20 to 30 women they employ. "They are local women, professional organizers and packers who love to help people and be of service," says Vance. "They love to do a job that's out of the corporate world and that's project oriented." Packing, transport, un-packing and setting up the new home takes one to four days, depending on the size of the home. The pre-packing is a different story: it can take much longer if people are moving to a much smaller space. "We help them choose what they want to keep, what will be donated or recycled, and we employ men with a truck to transport everything," says Vance. The team has many emotional stories to tell, such as the husband who took his family for a vacation before the move and secretly hired Carefree Moves to do the job while they were gone. "When they came back and discovered their new place ready to live in, including the kids' rooms, the wife said that it was the best thing he had ever done for his family," recalls Vance. The ladies also love to work for the Warriors when they trade a player. "In that case we do only the unpacking for them, but we completely set up their homes, including their closets, the kitchen, hanging the pictures, and we even put fresh flowers on the table," says Vance. Carefree Moves charges by the hour and Vance says that a complete move costs between \$2,000 and \$4,000. Since 2009 they have moved hundreds of families in the Bay Area.

### News from the Three Chambers of Commerce

#### Lafayette

Ribbon Cutting at 5 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 29 at the new location of Bay Sotheby's International Realty, 3725 Mt. Diablo Blvd.

The Marquis Business Person of the Year annual dinner honoring Leila Douglass of Douglass Designs will be held at 6 p.m. Friday, Jan. 30 at the Lafayette Park Hotel and Spa. The evening also includes the introduction of the chamber's 2015 board of directors, incoming president Debbie Cooper of Mechanics Bank, and the "State of the City" address by Mayor Brandt Andersson. Reservations can be made online at [lafayettechamber.org](http://lafayettechamber.org) or by calling (925) 284-7404.

Ribbon Cutting at 4 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 5 for Merrill Gardens at Lafayette, 1010 Second Street.

#### Moraga

Welcome breakfast for chamber members starting at 8 a.m. Friday, Feb. 6 at Terzetto in the Moraga Shopping Center.

Save the date for the Business Person of the Year dinner honoring Moraga Royale's Dianne Wilson at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 24 at the Moraga Country Club. Tickets are \$50; reservations required by contacting [Kathe@moragachamber.org](mailto:Kathe@moragachamber.org).

#### Orinda

Save the date for the Chamber Luncheon at 11:30 a.m. Friday, Feb. 20 at the Orinda Country Club. The Orinda Chamber of Commerce will present annual awards recognizing outstanding contributions to the chamber and the Orinda business community. Tickets are \$30; contact Candy at [info@orindachamber.org](mailto:info@orindachamber.org).

If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

### Levels of Competition in AKC Standard Obedience

According to the American Kennel Club, there are three levels of competition in Standard Obedience: Novice, Open and Utility. Novice is for the dog just getting started and includes exercises such as heel on leash and figure eight, as well as standing for examination. The Open level includes more complicated exercises, and Utility is the third and highest level of obedience competition, involving more complicated tasks including scent discrimination and signal exercises. To achieve the Obedience Trial Champion title, dogs with UD titles must win 100 points and a first-place in Utility B and Open B, plus a third first-place win in either class, under three different judges. For more information, visit [http://www.apps.akc.org/classic/events/obedience/getting\\_started.cfm](http://www.apps.akc.org/classic/events/obedience/getting_started.cfm).