

# Flowing like family

## MOIRA ANDERSON USES YOGA TO HELP OTHERS HEAL

BY JENNIFER GENTILE

Although she lost her home and all her material possessions in Hurricane Katrina, Moira Anderson found a spiritual home within herself that kept her going.

“Yoga, a stabilizing practice, really helped with that — so did the community of people gathering for class to move, breathe and connect back to the present moment,” says the veteran yoga teacher and licensed master social worker. “What was in our hearts could not be taken away, and that was truly beautiful and comforting.”

Anderson’s business, River Rock Yoga and Pilates, opened in 2006 in Ocean Springs — providing a refuge for a community reeling from the devastating storm. Today, the studio still prides itself on caring for all students, who range in age from 3 to 85, on a personal level. Anderson and her team often can be heard saying, “Everyone can do yoga.”

“Our students are curious, adventurous souls who make peace, wellness and personal evolution a priority; they also want to maximize their mobility and release tightness while improving joint comfort and agility,” Anderson says. “I love that our students inspire and support each other and look forward to seeing each other each week. We are truly like family!”

Some especially athletic clients enjoy a more active yoga flow while others prefer a gentler session that helps relieve aches and pains and fosters strength and flexibility. Anderson first turned to yoga to alleviate physical pain when her children were little.

“I was thrilled when I could finally turn my head again!” she recalls. “I committed to classes several times a week, and the practice quickly became central to my life and wellbeing.”

Anderson notes that humans have been

benefiting from yoga for 6,000 years — and the practice is at least as popular now as when she began teaching it over 20 years ago. An experienced instructor with over 500 hours of training, she has traveled extensively and studied with the country’s most renowned instructors. Since 2007, she has been coaching other instructors as part of a Yoga Alliance teacher training program, and since 2010, she has been working in clinical mental health settings using yoga therapeutically.

To Kimberly Jackson, who met her while she was teaching at World’s Gym in Ocean Springs, Anderson became a beloved and trusted mentor. When Anderson decided to launch her own studio, she approached Jackson about taking over her classes at the gym.

“I had never considered teaching yoga, but watching her skillful guidance as a teacher and knowing the positive effects on people’s health that yoga had was enough to inspire me,” Jackson recalls. “It wasn’t long before I was enrolled in several yoga teacher programs, including the very first teacher training program at River Rock Yoga and Pilates.”

Jackson has been instructing at River Rock for 15 years and recently became the studio’s manager. Jackson says Anderson earned her respect and loyalty through her dedication to helping people heal “on the deepest level.” During the COVID lockdown, for instance, when the studio was shuttered for three months, Anderson created an online studio where people could access live yoga and Pilates from their own homes.

“I watched her work tirelessly while going to college full time to complete her master’s in clinical social work; she was at the studio day and night completing her



Kimberly Jackson and Moira Anderson

studies, caring for teacher and student needs, running every aspect of the business and teaching countless healing yoga classes,” Jackson says. “That is her level of love for what we have at River Rock. Simply said, she is an inspiration on the highest level.”

Anderson and her team are set to make an even greater impact as River Rock undergoes an expansion. A new wellness destination is in the works in Ocean Springs, where River Rock will relocate within the next year. The Mississippi Center for Yoga and Health will include a larger studio and sanctuary space for River Rock, with a hot yoga studio, as well as expanded mental health services and Pilates offerings, aerial yoga, Reiki, massage and spa services, ayurvedic and nutrition services and other health-and-fitness-related offerings

The word yoga means “to yoke” or “bring together,” and Anderson says the current studio and the new center are about providing opportunities for connection.

“We pray that our presence in the community is welcoming, inspiring and educational,” she says. “If our center contributes in any way to bringing peace to people and reducing suffering, I will feel very blessed indeed.”