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Trading yoga pants for stilettos

By Neil Gonzales, STAFF WRITER
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REDWOOD CITY - CHRISTINA KISH swirled and twirled around a stainless-steel pole on black 7-inch stilettos.

She kicked up her legs and swung her arms. She leaned her back on the pole and slid down to the hardwood floors.

But this was no naughty, strip-club show.

It was just a good, clean and healthy workout.

Earlier this month, Kish and her friend Pam Courcier opened up Poletential off Middlefield Road, bringing Redwood City the latest — and perhaps sexiest — fitness phenomenon sweeping the country.

Their studio features 10 poles, a mirror running down the length of a wall and 5-inch stilettos that participants can wear during sessions.

"It's a cross between a gym and a night club," said Kish, 42. "Women come here for their workout and their dance."

Make no mistake, participants do get a robust workout.

"It's just plain hard," Kish said. For instance, "in order to twirl, you have to lift your body and hold it. You work your body and core strength."

Wearing stilettos is not just for sex appeal either. "They work out your legs and calves and your balance," Kish said.

But the sensual element of pole dancing does draw in the women, Kish said. "That's part of the attraction — the empowerment and being able to move in a sexy way."

Because the studio only takes women, Courcier said, "This gives them an opportunity to get their fitness in a way that is something for themselves (where) they are comfortable."

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Annalisa Loar, 38, of Redwood City attends pole dancing classes once a week. "It's super fun, and you're getting your fitness in at the same time," Loar said.

There's another thing. "You walk out after and you feel so sexy," Loar said. "You go to a grocery store, and people know you were wearing stilettos."

Her husband, Ryan, tells her to keep taking the classes. "It's just another way to exercise and strengthen yourself, so than other things like yoga," he said.

Over the years, pole dancing as a fitness approach has danced its way into the mainstream, thanks to celebrities, and media exposure.

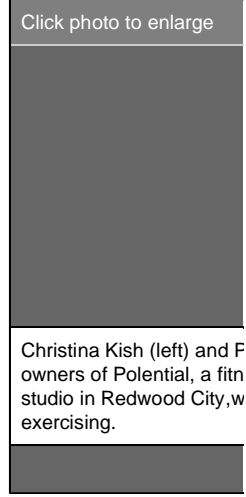
Fawnia Monday Dietrich, owner of Exotic Dance School in Las Vegas, is considered a pioneer in this fitness craze.

"I began teaching it in 1994, and since then there's been tremendous growth, especially the last four to five years," she said.

She said there are about 120 pole-dancing studios in the country. "They're popping up everywhere," she said.

Kish and Courcier, 38, who both have business and fitness backgrounds, decided to combine those skills to create their studio.

The pair, who live in Redwood City, also got tired of traveling to take pole-dancing classes elsewhere.



"We were taking classes in San Francisco and San Jose," Kish said. "Why do all this driving when we can do
Now they have about 100 students themselves, ranging from young women to mothers like Courcier.

"One night, we had a woman and her mother-in-law come in," Kish said.

For more information about Poletential, call (650) 701-1653.

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