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Local News / Home Page
Region/State News
World News
Business News
Sports - Professional
Arts & Entertainment
Columnists
Death Notices
Letters & Opinion
Society
Sports - Local
Style

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Burlingame Daily News
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Wednesday Nov 1

Come-hither fitness

Studio touts pole dancing as exercise

By Will Oremus

There's a new pole dancing joint in Redwood City, but don't go there expecting to find men swilling booze and watching performers. Don't expect to find any men, actually.

The owners of Poletential, which opens Thursday on Middlefield Road, are touting pole dancing as a female-only fitness craze. They're hoping that women who wouldn't dream of letting strangers slip twenties into their garters, will shell out \$60 for 90-minute workshops on moves such as the basic twirl, the carousel and the inversion.

It's as tough as a gym workout, but more exciting, said co-owner Christina Kish, 42.

"You will come out of here walking tall," Kish said. "It's like you've got a secret, some new aspect of your sensuality, as well as your strength."

On Tuesday, Kish and co-owner Pam Courcier, 38, both of Redwood City, were putting the finishing touches on the new studio, which is decked out with rope lights, mirrors, and 10 gleaming, 19-foot-tall poles. Against one wall stands a rack of six-inch stiletto heels.

"Just walking around in these things is a workout for your calves," Courcier said on a recent afternoon. Then she grabbed a pole with both hands, flipped upside down, spread her feet far apart and twirled gently to the ground.

"It's very hard," she said. "You're going to use muscles you didn't even know you had."

Casual customers can drop in for "introductory" Sunday workshops or arrange private parties with a group of friends. Those who want to get serious can sign up for weekly lessons.

Kish and Courcier got the idea for the business from similar studios in San Francisco, where they've each been taking lessons for about a year. "We kept hearing from our friends, 'What can we do around here for a girls' night?'" Courcier said.

Kish added, "Places like this in other parts of the country are booked solid."

While some pole dancing venues include lessons on more risqué moves, Poletential is strictly about fitness and self-expression, Courcier said. "You're doing it for yourself. No one's watching."

The owners already have some friends who are eager to sign up. One potential customer, named Rachel, declined to give her last name because she said her conservative parents wouldn't understand.

"For me it gets me in touch with my femininity," Rachel said. "As you're getting a little older it's kind of nice to feel like, 'Hey, I can still do this kind of thing.'"

Maria Cortez, 31, of Fremont, said she thinks pole dancing could take off "like yoga and Pilates" if people just keep an open mind. "It's always been accepted that exotic dancing or pole dancing are bad things, but honestly, it's just another way of dancing."



Konstandinos Goumenidis / Daily News

Poletential owners Christina Kish, foreground, and Pamela Courcier give a tour Tuesday of their new fitness center opening Thursday in Redwood City.

San Mateo

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Poletential will hold an open house for interested women on Thursday from 5 to 9 p.m. at the studio at 2682 Middlefield Rd., Unit N.

E-mail Will Oremus at woremus@dailynewsgroup.com.

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