

Our intern tries paddleboard yoga on LG

By Hannah Dineen

Chronicle Summer Intern

Last week, I explored the hybrid creation of two activities I love: stand-up paddleboarding and yoga. The practice of “stand-up paddleboard yoga” originated on the west coast and has only recently grown in popularity across the country in places like upper-state New York.

Patty Pensel, of “Patty’s Water Sports” on Lake George, was one of the first in the area to explore the practice and begin to teach others. Through one of Patty’s classes, taught by instructor Tobey Gifford, I realized that this unique practice was not only *not* as difficult as it sounds, but actually extremely fun and relaxing.

The particular group I joined was made up of 12 women, including Patty and Tobey, some who were experienced regulars to the class, and some who were both brand new to the class and the sport all together.

We started out with a slow paddle around Sandy Bay. After, we anchored in a shallow area of the cove and began the yoga portion of the class.

Tobey started us off with a few seated poses and then gradually instructed us into an array of standing poses. She offered many variations of poses to ensure that everyone (of all levels of experience) was comfortable and could follow along.

By the end of the lesson I’d gotten a bit cocky and decided to try a back-bend wheel pose, but ended up in the water. Luckily, in the summer months the water is warm and refreshing.

My sister, a veteran pro who can do a headstand on a paddleboard, laughed at me. I joined her. That was the type of environment it was — fun, a place where you



Our intern Hannan Dineen writes: “A photo of me in action. (Unfortunately not the one in the perfect backbend).”

could both relax and laugh.

Most everyone else managed to stay out of the water.

At the end of the class, Tobey asked us all to lie on our backs and close our eyes, telling us to feel the tiny waves and soak in our environment. It was so calming that I nearly fell asleep.

Once the 90-minute class was finished and we were back on dry land, I had the chance to talk to Patty and Tobey about running a paddleboard yoga class.

“I have been following stand-up paddleboarding, and everything about it, since 2009,” says Patty. “I had heard of people doing SUP yoga out on the west coast; it’s huge on the west coast.”

“I had taken yoga from Tobey before and I knew what a great and dedicated yoga practitioner she is. I knew it was something that she would really find interesting so I got in touch with her and we came together to start this program,” says Patty.

“Yes, Patty pushed me to start,” Tobey would later tell me. “At the time no one was doing it [stand-up paddleboard yoga]. Patty showed me how to paddle and I got to play around a little bit on the board. I loved it.”

The two women have been running the stand-up paddleboard yoga program for four years. They currently hold two sessions a week during summer — Tuesdays and Thursdays at 8 a.m. starting at Boats by George in Sandy Bay on Lake George.

Both Patty and Tobey say Sandy Bay is an excellent spot for the program. “I don’t think it can get any better,” says Patty. “Early in the mornings on weekdays are the best time around here for yoga. You want peace and quiet.”

“We’re so lucky to be able to do it there. I just love it there. There’s just a calmness in the water in the morning. It’s so peaceful; it’s hard not to feel relaxed,” says Tobey.

I asked her how paddleboard yoga differs from regular studio yoga — aside from the obvious. “The biggest difference is that your posture is moving constantly. I believe it takes more flexibility in your mind to be okay with the movement. On the paddle board, people have to be okay with bobbling and being able to fall in the water.

“You’re also outside in the beautiful sun. People try to bring natural music into the studio, but we have it all right there on the lake. Nature definitely adds a sense of

calm.”

Tobey calls stand-up paddleboarding a great “warm-up” for yoga, saying “there are many similarities between the two.” She mentions balance and focus on core strength as a few.

Tobey’s favorite part about instructing a SUP yoga class: “I love watching people relax at the end. A lot of times the sun will be out and you can relax in the sunshine. You can see people put their hands in the water and you just look at their bodies and how relaxed they are and it’s really beautiful. I love to help people relax.”

Although the majority of people who are drawn to the practice seem to be women, Patty says she has had a handful of men take the class. “It definitely isn’t just for women. Guys can do it, and there are many guys who take yoga who love it. I’d love to see that increase.”

Many women who take the class are young, but Patty says the majority of her attendees are “mature” women.

“I’m not going to say ‘old.’ I don’t like that word. I get mostly mature women because those are the ones who realize that you have to make time for yourself. You have to do yoga and seek out things for your health. Those women realize what a wonderful 90 minutes it is. It completely de-stresses you and you don’t even realize how good of a workout you’re getting.”

Similar to age and gender, the range of experience varies as well. Both women mention that many of the same people will continue the program year after year, but they constantly get new people to join who do not have any experience.

Tobey says, “We get really good feedback. People keep coming back and new people keep coming.”

For people who have interest but haven’t gathered the courage to try this new sport yet, Tobey emphasizes, “You’ve just got to try it! Today we had someone who had never paddle boarded or done yoga before and she did fine. She enjoyed it!”

“As with anything that you’re curious about, you just have to go for it! Anybody can do it.”