



Serving those who served

*Veterans Yoga Project offers
path to relaxation, resilience*

Story and photos by Virginia S. Gilstrap

Unlike other yoga classes, this one starts with the Pledge of Allegiance and three enthusiastic “Oorahs!”

The Veterans Yoga Project has been offered in Kerrville by yoga therapist Rick Trzcinski since 2017 to help area veterans release stress and improve their quality of life.

In 2007, Trzcinski himself was walking with a cane due to neurological issues from chronic Lyme disease and a serious fall from a roof. He attended a weekend workshop in Austin called “Yoga for a Healthy Neck and Back” and began practicing yoga for relief of his traumas, including PTSD and depression, as well as back and neck pain.

Recovering his health, the student became



The class practices the sun salute.

the teacher through training at the Living Yoga Program of Austin, earning his initial certification in 2009. Trzcinski continued training with a focus on yoga for therapy, receiving his yoga therapy certification from the International Association of Yoga Therapists in 2017.

Coming from a military family, Trzcinski grew up supporting veterans. He was part of the first class in 2010 of Dr. Daniel Libby's program, called the Veterans Yoga Project. The same year, he began weekly chair/wheelchair yoga at the Kerrville Veterans Affairs with the Alzheimer's/dementia group, which continued until COVID-19 arrived.

Trzcinski also trained in the iRest deep relaxation and meditation program that is utilized, along with VYP, in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to help veterans reduce PTSD, depression, anxiety, insomnia, chronic pain and chemical dependency. The research shows that the VYP and iRest practices increase health, resiliency and well-being.

In 2017, he trained and was certified in the Yoga for First Responders program, which is a job-specific practice to process stress and build resiliency. The same year, he started the weekly VYP Mindful Resilience class in Kerrville,

which now takes place at 3 p.m. on Mondays at the Kerrville Elks Lodge.

For the first few years, only two local Army vets, Ron Carroll and John D'Amore, came to the class.

D'Amore said the class helped him undergo eye surgery without sedation.

"What I did was yoga breaths in there, which was totally relaxing," D'Amore said.

His vision improved after a month.

Carroll, who is a lifelong athlete, said D'Amore invited him to the class.

"What this is doing is relaxing my body," Carroll said. "I can actually feel my muscles stretch and relax. And after a couple of years, I've told my friends back home, 'You know, I'm gonna do this for the rest of my life.'"

As the location changed and rooms got bigger, so did the class.

"A lot of these guys are Vietnam veterans," Trzcinski said. "They saw a lot of stuff. And they all love it [VYP]. It's just turned out to be a nice family, you know? Our veterans yoga family."

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After ten years, almost 20 local veterans participate in the chair yoga class, though several also do floor work.

Trzcinski said the VYP class incorpo-

rates five tools: movement, breath, gratitude, guided rest and resilience. On the day the VYP class was observed, he focused on the idea of grounding and shared information from an article about it. Afterward, he led the class through a meditative visualization of grounding their energy with that of the earth.

"This is really good for grounding and releasing negative energy," Trzcinski said. "So if you're sitting, maybe feel those roots coming out of your feet and going down into the earth, and if you're lying down, you can feel your whole body just releasing into the earth."

Later, after the stretching poses, Trzcinski played special meditative music, which was originally composed by Nikola Tesla as grounding frequencies. After the session, Mark Hoffman, whose right leg was amputated, told the class that during the meditation he experienced the sensation of his right leg relaxing completely for the first time. He released the tension he had been carrying related to his phantom limb.

"That's mind-boggling to me to feel that," Hoffman said. "I had to open my eyes and look at it. That's the power of this stuff, right?"

For more information, check out www.ricksyogatherapy.com.



(Right) The Veterans Yoga Project Mindful Resilience class meets weekly at the Kerrville Elks Lodge. Back row, from left, William Forest, Steve Wilson, Gary Noller, Forest Landry, Walter Saunders and Dell Caldwell. Middle row, from left, Cheri Bolden, John Walker, John Romero, David Horn and Mark Hoffman. Front row, from left, Rick Trzcinski, Ron Carroll, John D'Amore, Mike Bauhs and Butch Padier. Not pictured are Jim Koch, Jim Calvert and Jim Hutto. (Below) Some of the veterans do floor work at the end of class while others remain seated. (Opposite) Therapeutic yoga teacher Rick Trzcinski leads the class in stretching their wrists.

