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Family ties drive hot-yoga teacher

'We're all connected,' Langford studio owner says as he adds downtown location

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Feel free to call Ken Mayes a mamma's boy.

He really doesn't mind.

The owner of Bikram Hot Yoga studios in Langford -- and more recently downtown -- says pleasing the 80-year-old head of his large family gives him daily motivation to succeed in his business.

The youngest of seven children, Mayes has watched his mother Alceine lose three sons over the years, one murdered, another to cancer and, most recently, a death from heart disease.

"So she has to have some good news in her life, right? And that's what I try to give her," says Mayes, noting he's worked hard and made prudent decisions in growing a steady client base in Langford and now taking a leap in an already crowded yoga market downtown.

Bikram Hot Yoga differs from traditional Hatha styles, but has gained a faithful following by blending 26 ancient postures in a high-temperature room. The 90-minute workouts in 41 C heat is designed to loosen the muscles and increase blood flow.

"I think about how strong my mom has been and that's where my sense of duty and compassion comes from [in running my business]," said Mayes, 45, adding his mother is a descendant of freed slaves from Oklahoma who moved to Saskatchewan. "I'm motivated by that."

Mayes got another jolt a few years ago when his long-lost brother, Dwight, addicted to drugs at an early age and living on the streets in Winnipeg and



CREDIT: Darren Stone, Times Colonist

Ken Mayes was a high-school football star before knee operations sidelined his career. He found flexibility and fitness in hot yoga, which he practises at his existing Langford location and new downtown studio.

later Vancouver, walked right past him while he was stopped on his motorbike at a downtown crosswalk.

Mayes said his brother looked like just another street person with shabby clothes and thick beard. And he had the blank stare of a full-blown addict. "He was lost for 10 years, and suddenly I find him ... amazing," said Mayes.

It was his immediate reaction to feed, clothe and then think that he could cure Dwight right away. But it had disappointing results. His brother still lives on the street and uses drugs. Mayes said the most he can do is be there and offer his support. He drops off burgers, bottled water, blankets and clothing and sometimes just sits on the sidewalk and talks. Most addicts, Mayes now knows, have to kick it themselves.

Mayes started food drives for the homeless from his Langford studio and plans to do the same downtown for Our Place, where his brother is a regular.

There is "karma," Mayes believes, in his move downtown, saying while he creates his own community of clients, his business has a responsibility to help the larger community. And that includes the homeless and the addicts who share the streets.

"We're all connected. The people you see living on the streets are somebody's sister or brother, daughter or son," said Mayes.

Mayes, a Winnipeg native, was a football star in high school and university, but had a potential pro career scuttled with too many knee operations. He turned to yoga later in life to relieve pain and regain flexibility, saying he was amazed when he attended his first class that seniors involved in yoga had more flexibility than himself.

He bought the Bikram studio at 1015 Fort St. in February from Dr. Diva Chandna, who had spent \$1.2 million to transform the former two-floor restaurant into two big studios and modern change and shower rooms.

Between his two locations, Mayes has 14 teachers and five full-time support staff who co-ordinate about 70 classes a week.

Mayes spent more than \$135,000 converting a former pharmacy into his first location in Langford.

But there is plenty of competition as yoga continues to explode in popularity, particularly with baby boomers. There are more than two dozen private yoga studios in Greater Victoria -- not to mention programs offered through community centres. As for the Bikram high-temperature variety, there are four studios in Victoria and seven on the Island, said Mayes.

An open house at both locations continues today and tomorrow. For free class times, check www.bikramyogavictoria.com

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