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Living well

*An active life and healthful eating
contribute to personal well-being*

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Debra Booker, 49, takes a holistic approach to staying fit, and her efforts have her feeling more energized, centered and healthy now than she ever has.

"I think I feel better now than I ever have, which is amazing to me," Booker said. She and her husband, Bill, own Lexington Healing Arts Academy, where she also assists in the yoga teacher-training program.

Booker says that for her, staying active and eating right have always been the hallmarks of being happy and well.



PHOTO BY JOSEPH REY, AU

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— Debra Booker

She first discovered the benefits of weight training and aerobics while still in high school and college in New York State in the 1980s. Booker found she enjoyed dancing — just for fun. While living in Boulder, Colo., she discovered newfound passions for hiking, biking, running and walking — and just being outside in any capacity.

“I love moving. Movement makes me happy,” said Booker, who came to Lexington in 2002 with Bill and their children, Isabelle and Ben, now 13 and 11, to be closer to Bill’s family.

Eating well was engrained at an early age by her mother, who opened a health foods store when she was just 13.

“I grew up on tofu and rice cakes and sunflower seeds,” said Booker, who still eats very little meat and chooses organic fruits and vegetables whenever possible. “The more you know how eating well affects you, the more you want to do it — because it feels good to eat clean.”

While she’s always been active and physically

fit, she credits the addition of yoga to her regimen about 10 years ago with making her feel better — on the inside and out — than she ever had before.

Strength, flexibility

“I like to say yoga isn’t a workout, it’s a work-in,” Booker said. “It’s not just about what you do on the mat; it all transcends to your daily life. It’s about being strong and flexible and breathing in your poses, but also about being strong and flexible in life.

“It teaches you to deal with stressful situations when you’re out in the world,” she added. “Life is challenging, and yoga — and the awareness it teaches — helps bring you back to yourself. It’s taught me to listen to my body and really manage my stress.”

Now a regular yoga instructor and director at the Academy’s Yoga Center, which she helped launch five years ago, Debra routinely teaches classes where she’s the youngest in attendance.

“In one class last week, we had 14 participants, and they were all boomers and older,” she said. “My oldest student is 89, and she comes twice a week. She is amazing.”

Booker’s yoga classes tend to emphasize proper alignment, breathing awareness and safety above all else.

“Basically, if you can breathe, you can do our classes. We are not about achieving the advanced poses you see on the cover of magazines. Maybe those are OK when you are 20, but when you start getting a little older, you have to seriously protect your joints and know how to move correctly,” she said.

When Booker leaves the yoga studio after a class, she feels simultaneously energized and yet calmer in both body and mind.

“You come out, and you have more clarity. You’re more present within yourself,” she said. “And when you’re more present, it allows you to foster a sense of gratitude and appreciation for everything.” ■