

Ashram, retreat center in Sligo making headway

By HANNAH BAILEY
Staff writer

SLIGO—Four years have passed since Leela Mata chose to establish her Peaceful Valley Ashram and Retreat in the former Clarion County rest home along Route 68 just outside of Sligo. While there is still much work to be done to renovate the 112 year-old structure, the ashram and retreat center has seen some headway.

"When I bought this place it seemed like a crazy thing to do," said Mata, an internationally-renowned yoga instructor. "We can really see it turning around."

The facility was built in 1898 and served as the county's care home until the Clarview Nursing and Rehabilitation Center was built near the facility. It had sat empty for nearly 30 years before Mata purchased it in 2006 as the site for her retreat and primary residence.

Half the 13-acre property is now usable, but only the Red House is winterized. While there is still a long list of building renovations to be completed, Mata spoke with great excitement about the organic garden that now exists on the property. And in keeping with the building renovations, a massage room and steam bath were added.



By Hannah Bailey

Leela Mata gives a lecture at an open house Saturday in her Peaceful Valley Ashram and Retreat in the former Clarion County rest home on Route 68 in Sligo. Mata, an internationally-

renowned yoga instructor and Ayurveda expert, spoke on how to achieve health and happiness through a yogic lifestyle. The ashram is in its fourth year of operation.

However, the long list of projects left to be done requires a lot more workers than Mata has to spare. Devaki, a yoga instructor and massage therapist at the ashram, said volunteers of any skill set are always welcome to lend a hand.

"It is nice always to see the ashram full of life," Devaki said.

In addition to changes in the facility, the ashram has also added a yoga instructor course that Mata hopes to expand in the future if it generates enough interest.

The ashram will host a yoga day Saturday, Aug. 28. The day will begin at 10 a.m. with yoga and end after Mata presents a lecture at 1 p.m. on how to cultivate inner peace at 1 p.m..

Mata typically travels throughout the year to present lectures and teach classes, and the retreat is often closed during the winter due to a lack of staff. But the ashram will be able to stay open this winter and will offer its yoga classes, yogic meals and meditation and Satsang.

"The fact we can't be here all the time has stunted the

growth," Mata said. Since the ashram will be open through the winter this year, Mata is looking forward to more community support.

"This is a place that is helpful to the community," Mata said. "It has the possibility to help the local economy."

Mata and her staff continue to look at new marketing options to gather local interest. While the ashram has seen attendees from foreign nations and neighboring states, a lot of local interest has yet to be generated.

Ideas such as hosting additional open houses and guest lecture opportunities in the area are being explored.

Mata said the first open house she hosted generated a lot of interest, but now she hopes those individuals will come back to see the changes that have been made.

Mata also encouraged people in the area give yoga a try.

"I want to get this idea of yoga psychology out," Mata said. "Once people start yoga, start to find inner peace, they want to share that."

Mata, a native of British Guiana, began teaching yoga in 1975. She directed the Yoga Vedanta Center in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and during her time in Florida she and Yogi Hari developed the Sampoorna Yoga, training more than 700 teachers who practice throughout the world.

Mata comes from the Sivvananda lineage and studied directly under Swami Vishnu Devananda for seven years. She also studied Ayurveda, the art of self-healing and longevity, in the United States and India.

Open house

An open house Saturday at the retreat attracted attendees from the area as well as individuals from State College, Ohio and West Virginia.

The day began at 10 a.m. with a yoga class given by Devaki, a native of Germany. At noon, guests packed tightly in a friendly environment where they shared a vegetarian yogic meal and dessert called "simply wonderful."

Following lunch, guests adjourned to the meditation room and sat barefoot as Mata spoke on a way to happiness through yoga.

"Health and happiness is something we all want," Mata said. She told the attendees the external search for happiness fails to bring results but self-knowledge is the way.

Mata said each person is a "unique individual with cosmic potential." She encouraged individuals to "waken up within you that storehouse of blessings."

"You are not out to change the world," Mata said of the yogic lifestyle. "You are out to change yourself."

Additional information is available by visiting www.leelamata.com.