

Yoga teacher says Peaceful Valley has sense of airiness, tranquility

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She comes from the Sivananda lineage and studied directly under Swami Vishnu Devananda for seven years.

Mata also studied Ayurveda in the United States and India, and she is an expert in Ayurveda, which is the art of self-healing and longevity.

Mata directed the Yoga Vedanta Center in Fort Lauderdale and while there she and Yogi Hari developed Sampoorna Yoga, training more than 700 teachers who practice throughout the world.

More information can be found online at www.leelamata.com.

Built in 1898

The local facility was built in 1898 and originally served as the county's care home.

It has a main house, two large "hub" rooms in the center with cathedral ceilings and a fireplace, plus two large wings that are lined with a total of 30 bedrooms.

There is also a huge barn — one of the area's oldest — behind the complex that Mata hopes can be renovated to serve as a great hall for performances, concerts and other community-oriented activities.

"The scale of it is stunning," said Narada Wise, a professional engineer and yoga instructor who lives in the Akron, Ohio, area.

He said the top priority is to replace the barn's roof at an estimated cost of \$20,000.

They are working to establish a Web site at www.savethebarn.org toward that end.

Wise said the wood is in perfect shape.

Preserving history

The nursing complex sat empty for nearly 30 years after the Clarview Nursing & Rehabilitation Center was built next to it.

But Wise said the building itself is sound.

"Places aren't built like this anymore," he said.

He said they have talked with representatives of the Clarion County Historical Society about the project.

"We're interested in preserving the history" of the property and its

facilities, Wise said. "That's important to us."

Meanwhile, there is much renovation work to be done.

Those involved with the project anticipate the front residential part of the facility, which is where the most recent owners lived, will be used for yoga training initiatives in these preliminary stages.

The two side wings are not heated, and there is peeling paint on every wall.

Wise said plans call for a total demolition and rebuilding of the back part of the facility as it sustained significant damage due to water leaks over the years.

Ideas regarding the use of the outdoor area include an organic garden, orchard and possible pond.

Mata said she would like the public to view it as a recreational destination.

She said she initially wondered if the place would feel heavy or damp due to its age and building materials.

But, no, she said she was pleasantly surprised to find it had a sense of airiness and tranquility.

The countryside is beautiful as is the grand and detailed architecture of the building, Mata said.

She said it didn't take her long to decide this was the right place for her ashram.

And, she sees this new purpose as coming full circle.

The home was built to help others, said Mata, and the Peaceful Valley ashram will continue that special tradition of "helping in a different way."

She said she sees great potential in the location.

Finding the retreat

Mata found the listing for Peaceful Valley in Sligo online before giving a retreat in March in Ohio.

She then asked her long-time student, Bhairavi, to check out the listing.

Bhairavi was told the property was not being shown at that time because there was a contract.

Mata said she was disappointed with the news.

However, Bhairavi received an e-mail in April that the farm was back on the market.

She then contacted Mata, who

Mata is considered expert in Ayurveda

Leela Mata says she sees the science of enlightenment as a "beautiful blend of Ayurveda, Yoga, and meditation."

Ayurveda is the "science of life" and originated in India more than 5,000 years ago.

It is regarded as "the mother of all healing," according to information at www.leelamata.com.

Traditionally, it has been handed down from accomplished masters to the disciples.

Experts say by keeping a proper balance of the energies in the body, the process of physical deterioration and disease can be impressively reduced.

Yoga is an exact science for the development of the human being, which is a complex combination of willpower, feeling and thinking.

Meditation is a practice to increase relaxation and refresh

an individual for further activities and can significantly support the eradication of bad habits.

The Leela Mata Foundation for Enlightenment promotes human happiness, health and creative growth.

It lists workshops related to the Ayurvedic philosophy, massage therapy, cooking and beauty care.

"Leela Mata embodies compassion in a rare way," said Yamuna Devi, co-founder and program director of the Three Rivers Yoga Institute in Coraopolis. "She is a wonderful teacher with profound knowledge and insight. Studying with Leela is a joy and her fountain flows freely for all who thirst to be nourished by the nectar of the teachings of Yoga brought to life."

was in Europe at the time.

Bhairavi toured the property with yoga instructor Leigh Ann Wise, who is Narada's wife.

"Leigh Ann and I both went away with a strong feeling that Peaceful Valley Farm needed to be an ashram," Bhairavi said.

She said she told Mata, who was able to visit the site after her trip was cut short.

"In one weekend, I bought it," said Mata.

Another couple had been living in the front residence for the last five years, and they had completed a number of renovation projects.

Mata said she bought the entire property, which includes seven outbuildings, for \$250,000 in June.

The purchase ended her six-year-long search.

She said she has been out and

about in Clarion and the surrounding area introducing herself and finding out more about the community.

Mata said she is excited about the project and hopes to see some real progress over the next year.

A number of yoga instructor friends and volunteers are helping.

She is also researching grant programs that may be available as well as possible partnership through Clarion University.

A devotional ceremony and blessing of the ashram was held during the open house this month.

Mata said she has also spoken with a master gardener about the maintenance of the grounds.

Everything is in the early planning stages, she said.

"Right now there are a lot of ideas," she said. "Nothing is fixed."