

THEY LIKE TO MOVE IT, MOVE IT

# Kids crushin' it

Amy's Active Learning in Clinton gets kids' minds and bodies moving



PETER HVIZDAK - NEW HAVEN REGISTER

Amy Stevens, of Amy's Active Learning, teaching an exercise segment of a program teaching preschoolers the importance of living healthy through Yoga and Pilates at Body Karma Studio in Clinton.

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**CLINTON** » So much for New Year's resolutions. Studies show that nearly 50 percent of Americans ditch their gym memberships by the end of January.

On any given Wednesday afternoon this winter, poke your head into a session of Amy's Active

Learning at Body Karma at 5 E. Main St. in Clinton, and you'll see an entirely different demographic.

Specifically, a group of kids, aged 4 to 8, "ice skating" on paper plates, painting winter scenes, constructing bear caves out of hula hoops, and then, yoga-like, pretending to hibernate.

The leader of Amy's Active Learning, which began a six-

week program at Body Karma last week, is Branford's Amy Stevens, whose mission is to spread the gospel on the importance of exercise, both in mind and body, at an early age.

That there's little downtime in the 90-minute session is by design. "Kids love to be active," the lithe, perennially upbeat 30-year-old said. "It's built into them."

Rather than vegetating in front of screens for hours, she added, "I want to help kids get used to being stimulated physically and mentally."

The preschool teacher at The Learning Village in Madison can speak with authority on this. It's not just her bachelor's and master's degree in early childhood ed-

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ucation or her nine years of experience in that field.

Or even her training in Discover CATCH, the prestigious nationwide program aimed at launching kids toward healthier lifestyles, that she implemented while teaching at early learning center sites around the Boston area.

It's that the two-time marathoner and endurance cyclist practices what she preaches.

"Amy has an almost palpable passion for living a healthy and active lifestyle and it's contagious," said George Norden, owner of Joint Effort, an exercise center in Guilford and Old Saybrook for the over-50 set.

Said Stevens, a Clinton native: "Children learn in all different ways but, most importantly, children learn by example. That's why I do all the activities with the kids. It's so important to me to be a positive role model for them."

If that means navigating an obstacle course or building ships or making a cranberry bog and then joining her charges in dipping her hands into the bog, the former Morgan School volleyball, basket-



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Doing the superman - Yoga at Amy's Active Learning teaches little ones to express their creativity and how not to 'sit still' at a program at the Body Karma Studio in Clinton.

ball, and soccer stand out is all in.

"Kids love to be messy and that's okay," said Stevens, who moonlights teaching kids' art classes with her mother Cindy Stevens at Clinton's Cindy Stevens Fine Arts Studio Gallery. "That's how they

learn."

For Stevens, "sitting still" is not in the children's dictionary." Hence, her resolve to "incorporate fun, energizing movement games and exercises into every workshop to keep brains and bodies moving and developing."

Freeze dance, for example, helps kids learn how to follow directions, learn body control and balance,

and get their heart rate up. "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" is a tool not just for teaching counting, days of the week, and life stages; it's a way to convey healthy eating habits. And turning crumpled pieces of paper into colorful artwork demonstrates that making art isn't about being perfect, but using your imagination.

It's quite simple. "When kids are having fun, they're

more likely to soak in what they're learning," she said. "Once you see a spark of interest in their eyes, they just dig in."

Deandres Morriar, whose daughter MiaBella has participated in several of Amy's Active Learning workshops, has seen

that spark. "Amy is totally hands-on with the children," she said, adding that her family factors the after-school sessions into their budget. "She leads them in exercises without them even realizing they're doing meditation and yoga. It's amazing."

Alayna Makkouk agreed. "Amy really has a gift with kids," she said. "And she truly cares about them." At a workshop at Makkouk's home, she described Stevens as having her two young sons "singing songs and reading stories and doing all sorts of activities."

For Makkouk, Stevens is a rare commodity. "She's not just gifted, she's a gift," she said.

So much so that, New Year's resolution or not, it's safe to say the kids in Amy's Active Learning will not just be sticking to their activities, but asking for more.

Amy's Active Learning meets on Wednesdays from 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. through Feb. 17 at Body Karma Studio, 5 E. Main Street, Clinton. The workshop is open to children aged 4 to 8. To register, email [amysactivelearning@gmail.com](mailto:amysactivelearning@gmail.com) or call 860-304-2347. Space is limited. For more information on future programs, birthday parties, and home workshops, visit [amysactivelearning.com](http://amysactivelearning.com).



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Amy Stevens, of Amy's Active Learning, teaches preschoolers ways to express their creativity while learning



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Amy Stevens, of Amy's Active Learning, reads to Camden Brockett, 3, of Ivoryton, and other preschoolers as she teaches ways to express their creativity while learning the importance of living healthy.