

Rhythmic gym continues to grow in new space

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Tucked into an industrial corner of Kirkland lies a haven for grace and artistic talent. It is the central idea to Arzu Kara students. At La



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“Every child is unique and the best in her own way,” said Karaali, which is the gym’s mission and philosophy. “It’s the academy’s philosophy to work with every child. It’s not just a belief, that’s the way it is.”

The nonprofit, which bounced around location-wise for several years, now has a permanent home at 11251 120th Ave. N.E. Suite 150 in Kirkland. Karaali has about 40 students at the moment, but says she hopes the gym can expand and grow.

“It’s really beautiful and graceful,” she said of the sport. Her students, which range in age from 3-years-old up to 15-years right now, have a variety of backgrounds from beginner to experienced in gymnastics. She said for interested students, no experience of any kind is needed to enjoy and learn the sport.

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Karaali, who has been coaching for over 20 years, including at the Olympic level, has degrees in physical education and over seven years of training with classical ballet, which is what she uses as a foundation for her students.

“It helps a lot with the postures, knowing what they are supposed to be,” she said of the many years of hands-on work she’s done.

While rhythmic gymnastics may not be on the radar of the general American public just yet, it’s growing in popularity. Like many other sports it helps students learn about discipline, a sense of self and creativity, with a more artistic touch than other activities. Plus, Karaali said, the girls love the costumes.

“Everything is so artistic, and it brings it out of you,” she said. “It helps education the body on correct postures.”

Karaali said it’s of high importance to her that her students take away what they are looking for in their time at the gym. For some, it’s about learning the different aspects of rhythmic gymnastics and spending time with friends and for others it becomes more competitive over time. Karaali said many times in the beginning, a student tries it just to see what it’s all about, falls in love and the passion grows from there. Because of her philosophy, Karaali not only has one of the biggest gyms in the region, but also has been one of the most successful. Students who take part in the competitive side of the sport at La Luna have been to the Junior Olympics National meet. In the last five years, La Luna has had a student qualify for the meet each year, after placing in the top 10 at the regional competition.

The gym uses the USA Gymnastics training system which starts students off with learning the basics, including how to work with the hoop, ball and rope before moving on to clubs and ribbons. Karaali said the first three are easier for new students to master and typically they advance to the last two after a couple years of training.

This summer the gym is offering summer camp, which run for a week at a time, and are open to all age levels and beginners. Karaali said she keeps the groups small, usually no more than 12 so that each can get individual attention. This summer, she said, they are offering a special deal – anyone who signs up for two weeks of summer camp will get the third week free. Camps begin July 5 and run each week until the middle of August.

“I’d like to attract new girls and welcome new beginners,” she said. While she coaches at the gym, she also has several other coaches who help her, including former students who often help teach the younger girls, as well as a ballet teacher. The nonprofit also offers scholarships to students who may not otherwise be able to come. Karaali said it’s very important to her that if there is a girl who wants to come to the gym, but can’t afford it, that they will find a way to make it happen.

“I’d like to thank the community and the parents for allowing me to train with their child and the opportunity to help them learn the truly unique beauty of the sport,” said Karaali.

“This support is greatly needed and appreciated.”

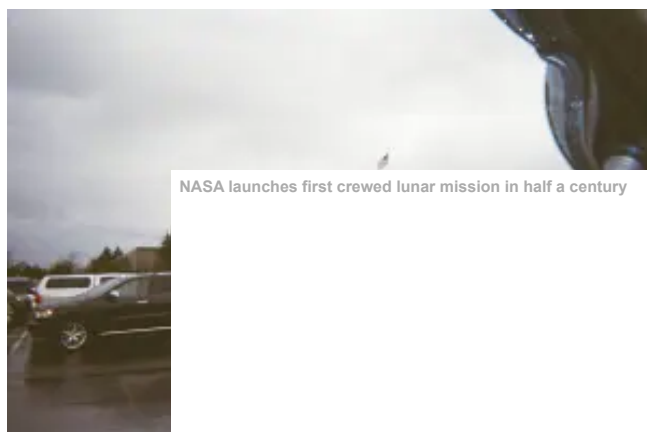
To learn more about La Luna Gym and rhythmic gymnastics visit www.lalunagym.com (<http://www.lalunagym.com/>) or call (425) 681-4303.

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