

SUNDAY PROFILE

# Yoga on a mission



Yoga instructor Jen Banks teaches a class Thursday with student Sarah Mischke at the Laramie Community Recreation Center. Banks has used yoga to help overcome addiction, and now, she hopes to show others how it can be used in their lives. JEREMY MARTIN/Boomerang photographer

## Practice helps instructor overcome addiction

By EVE NEWMAN  
even@laramieboomerang.com

The date almost four years ago is one Jen Banks won't soon forget. On Aug. 11, 2012, she remembers attending a yoga class for the first time. She didn't know what to wear. Her body wasn't used to the unusual movements. "My legs were shaking," she said. At the end of the class, students were instructed to lay down on their backs, eyes closed. The teacher rubbed oil on her forehead. "I don't know what it was, but I just started crying," she said.

That first taste of the practice led to a full-fledged passion that had Banks attending classes whenever she could, even if she had to leave town to do so. "I got a little obsessive with it," she said. Banks had just graduated from Albany County Drug Court that summer. When she found yoga, she called it her own "wrap-around service," something to replace the intensity and structure that was helping her stay clean. Yoga forced her to be still, confront her thoughts, then deal with the emotions that welled up. The discipline was a physical activity with a spiritual core, and she was all in.

"It was almost a replacement for drugs and alcohol," she said. These days, Banks is on a mission to bring yoga to anyone and everyone, not just those who have the right pants. She teaches classes at Laramie County Community College and has also taken yoga to Cathedral Home for Children and back to drug court. In the summer, she's working with people in Douglas struggling with drug use and mental health disorders. "Any opportunity I have to try and give it away for free, I will do that," she said.

See Banks, B5



HOW TO

## How to build your wedding budget

METRO — Couples engaged to be married have a lot on their plates as they begin planning their weddings. Whereas tradition once demanded parents of the bride pay for a couple's wedding, nowadays, more and more engaged couples are completely or partially financing their own nuptials. That means prospective brides and grooms must develop wedding budgets that won't

ensure their first act as Mr. and Mrs. is paying down debt. In its 2015 Real Weddings Study, online bridal resource The Knot found many couples still receive substantial financial support from their parents to pay for their weddings. The survey found that, on average, the bride's parent's contributed 44 percent of the overall wedding budget in 2015, while couples financed 43 percent

(the remaining 13 percent was financed by the groom's parents and additional sources). Couples who hope to follow that formula or pay for their weddings on their own can heed the following tips to build wedding budgets that won't break the bank but will still ensure a day to remember forever.

See Wedding budget, B5



## Wedding budget

Continued from B1

### EXAMINE YOUR COLLECTIVE FINANCES

Few couples know the details of each other's finances before getting engaged. While some might still hesitate to share their personal financial information upon engagement, an open and honest discussion and examination of each person's finances is the only way to develop a realistic wedding budget both partners can live with. Once couples know what they can contribute, they can then consult their parents to determine if their mothers and fathers intend to contribute.

### DEVELOP A PRELIMINARY GUEST LIST

A preliminary guest list can give couples an idea of how large and expensive their weddings will be. According to the Real Weddings Study, the average cost per wedding guest in 2015 was \$237. While that cost can vary greatly depending on geography and other factors, couples should keep that figure in mind when drafting their guest lists. If need be, keep costs down by trimming the guest list so it includes only close family members and friends.

### DON'T COUNT ON GIFTS

Many couples justify runaway wedding budgets by telling themselves they will ultimately get the money back via wedding gifts. While many guests will give financial gifts, counting on such windfalls is a recipe for accruing debt. Do not build potential wedding gifts into your wedding budget. If you do so and your expectations fall short, you could be facing considerable debt upon returning home from your honeymoon.

### GATHER QUOTES BEFORE CHOOSING WHERE TO TIE THE KNOT

Where couples get married will have a great influence on how much money they will spend on their weddings. For example, the Real Weddings Study found that, in 2015, the average wedding in Manhattan cost couples slightly more than \$82,000, while the average Alaskan wedding cost just more than \$17,000. Venues within the same city can vary greatly with regard to pricing and offerings as well, so couples should give themselves ample time to gather quotes and find an affordable venue they like.

### BUILD EXTRA COSTS INTO YOUR BUDGET

When determining a budget you can live with, remember to include a little extra for unforeseen costs. Weddings are large undertakings, and it's reasonable to expect some unexpected costs to arise. Building such costs into your initial budget will make these circumstances that much easier to handle.

Budgets can help couples stay on track and avoid debt as they plan their weddings.

## Banks

Continued from B1

### 'Off the deep end'

Banks grew up in Gillette, a town she described as socially stratified and sports-obsessed.

She showed promise as a basketball player in junior high school and embraced the sports culture until injuries slowed her athletic career and caused her to question the Christian faith of her youth.

In high school, she turned to meth, shooting up for the first time when she was 17 to help get through classes and a late-night job at a local diner. She graduated high school in 2002 and began attending the University of Wyoming, where she tried cocaine, pain pills and heroin. She got her first DUI in 2005.

In 2008, her father, a coal miner, died at her Gillette home. He had been drinking and taking pain pills when he fell a dozen feet onto a concrete pad, where he froze to death. The accident pushed her further into a self-destructive spiral.

"I went off the deep end," she said. "There was no rhyme or reason."

After two more DUIs, Banks would up in the Albany County Detention Center off and on through the spring and summer of 2009. She remembers Laramie Jubilee Days from behind bars, when music from downtown street dances filtered through a tiny window late at night.

Banks joined drug court at that point, a system of intensive treatment combined with probation, drug testing and other requirements, offered in lieu of prison time. At one point during the program, she wore a GPS tracking device on one ankle and an alcohol-monitoring device on the other.

She was not a model participant. She resisted counseling and tried to avoid the drug tests.

"I was a really crappy drug court participant," she said.

But very slowly, the work paid off. Banks credits counselor Tina Mansfield with helping her learn to love and forgive herself.

"She was so tender with me," Banks said. "That's all I needed."

**"You don't have to be flexible. You don't have to be strong. You don't have to be anything except willing to be lead through a practice."**

JEN BANKS

### 'An atmosphere of acceptance'

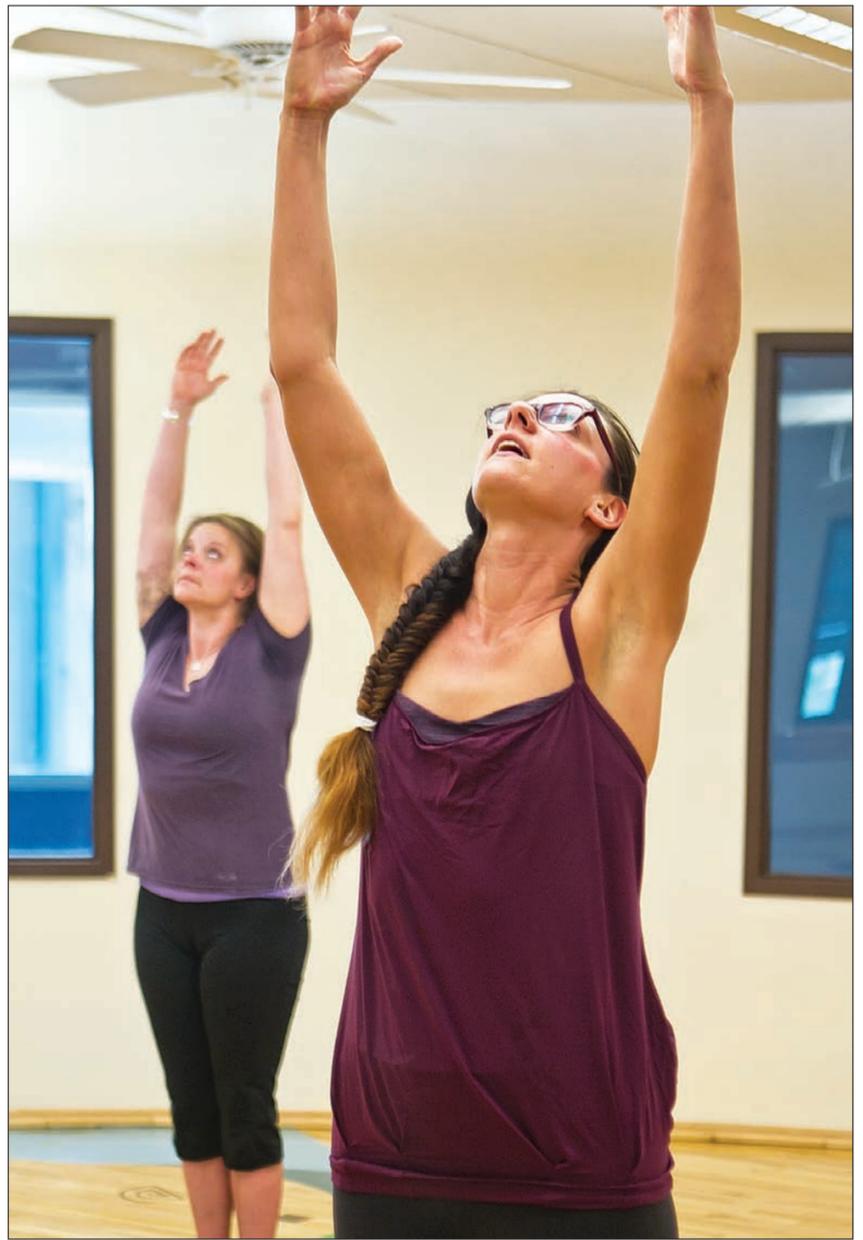
During the two years she was in the program, Banks learned how to stay sober, and she started working out again. As she finished, she discovered yoga, then she went to graduate school at UW to become a counselor herself.

Yoga had done so much for her that she wanted to share it with others. She started with drug court, where she taught a Friday-night session to former classmates.

She said yoga is the perfect activity for someone recovering from any sort of addiction. It calms the body and the mind, which is good training for when cravings hit. It's also an activity that provides community but without any expectations.

"At first, you can tell the trauma they have in their bodies," she said of participants. "By two or three sessions, they just relax."

Banks embraces the spiritual aspect of yoga. Some yoga practitioners



Yoga instructor Jen Banks teaches a class Thursday with student Sarah Mischke at the Laramie Community Recreation Center. Banks is on a mission to bring yoga to anyone and everyone. JEREMY MARTIN/Boomerang photographer



emphasize seven spiritual laws — among them the laws of karma, potentiality and giving and receiving. Banks said they can overlap with the 12-step recovery program of Alcoholics Anonymous as well as the teachings of major religions, including Christianity.

These days, Banks works as an advisor at LCCC while also teaching psychology and yoga. Her classes, hosted at the Laramie Community Recreation Center, draw participants from across the community.

Leslie Waggener, an associate archivist at UW, took a class with Banks this spring. The class included yoga but also mindfulness and meditation practice.

Waggener said Banks was open about

her own struggles, which created an environment where everyone felt free to be themselves.

"She created an atmosphere of acceptance," Waggener said. "I really appreciate that about her."

Waggener said Banks demystified the practice, even admitting to being perhaps the least flexible yoga coach out there.

"She's so down-to-earth and honest in her approach," Waggener said.

Banks said she's willing to take yoga wherever she finds a need.

"You don't have to be flexible," she said. "You don't have to be strong. You don't have to be anything except willing to be lead through a practice."

**Delivery Questions?**  
Call Boomerang Circulation directly at 307-742-2176

On Saturdays, please leave a message after 9 am.

LARAMIE BOOMERANG

**PUBLIC NOTICE & A**

Want to know what your government does for you?

Read the public notice section of this newspaper.

**NEWSPAPERS AND PUBLIC NOTICES**

Helping Wyoming residents keep track of their tax money since 1887

**LIV**  
In-Home Counseling & Care Management, LLC

Adults, Family members, or Healthcare Providers  
**LIV can help**

**2015 NASW Agency of the Year**

- Remain independent
- Treat anxiety, depression, grief and loss issues
- Access and navigate health care services such as Home Health Care, Assisted Living, Long Term Care, Medicare, Medicaid, VA, Social Security

LIV offers adults, seniors and their families care management and counseling in the home.

Please call us today at **307 630-4729**  
Insurance accepted and/or sliding scale  
Providers send referral to:  
**fax: 307-632-3298**  
[www.livcare.org](http://www.livcare.org)