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EDITOR'S PICK

SPOTLIGHT

TOP STORY

Local pole sports athletes preparing for regional competition

Jeff Gardner 6 hrs ago



Rafaela shows off her skills and strength

Courtesy Photo

Katrina Wyckoff danced ever since she was a kid. In 2006, she became director of the Centre Stage Dance Studio in Oro Valley, and continued formal dancing. But in 2013, when she stumbled upon a pole sport and dancing class, everything changed.

"I saw the good that pole brought out as people discovered their own strengths and styles," Wyckoff said. "People don't realize there's a whole athletic side to it."

Now, Wyckoff is helping to host the regional competitions for the US Pole Sports Federation and is part of a committee that is drafting the codebook for what may someday be an Olympic event.

Once Wyckoff started working with poles in her dancing, she implemented them at Centre Stage. But soon, the dancers of Oro Valley became interested, and even more than that, passionate. Before long, the dance studio was filled with poles, so Centre Stage founded a second location to keep up with the demand.

“What started as a few poles in the corner of the dance studio grew into a whole sport of its own,” she said. “It has come so naturally. There’s a need for people to have a place to go to, and to fall in love with their work out at.”

Poling generally starts as fitness with most people, but as time goes on and their strength improves, it becomes a sport and contains a life and artistry of its own, much like gymnastics. For a set, the athletes choose 10 moves to perform from five categories. Professional pole sport sets are based on three A’s: artistry, athleticism and adventure.

Of course, exercising in and around a pole holds a stigma. Although poles have been used in fitness across the world for centuries, in the modern day, they are undoubtedly associated with erotic dancing.

“Of course there’s a stigma, but we’re not on some big mission to change people’s minds,” she said. “As people see the athletic passion, the stigma will be removed.”

When skeptics see a pole athlete 6 feet in the air, holding themselves at a 180-degree angle with just their forearm strength, and then doing a backflip from that pose onto the ground below, they'll probably be convinced it's a form of fitness, if not a perfectly legitimate sport.

"What's so exciting is that anyone can do it," she said. "The sport really doesn't discriminate. People can exercise on poles at any age or fitness level."

For instance, Centre Stage will host performers at the regional tournament from ages of six into the 60s.

The Southwest Regionals will be held at the Berger Theater from May 18 to 20. World pole champion Rafaela Montanaro will be in attendance along with pole super star athlete Samantha Star Cuomo and USPSF President Summer Vyne.



Winners of the regionals will head onto the nationals in Las Vegas, and then possibly the world championships in Florida. The best of the best pole champions will have the opportunity to compete in the newly formed pole category at the 2019 World Sports Games in Tortosa, Spain.

"It's a long road and there are obstacles to overcome," she said. "But the exciting thing is that people are working on those obstacles."

Wyckoff says one of the most exciting aspects for her is the knowledge that pole athletes from all over the nation are coming right here to Oro Valley to train for national- and world-level games. And some of the athletes who make it all the way to the top might be from the Tucson area as well.

“Probably 50 percent of people are skeptical whether they can do it,” she said. “But a small part of them says ‘what if?’ and they nurture that until it becomes a full-fledged dream.”

Learn more about the sport at uspolesportsfed.org. Centre Stage Pole Fitness is located at 1335 W. Lambert Lane, #115.

