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Nuggets coach Karl backs specialized yoga studio

BY ED SEALOVER
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At 61, Denver Nuggets Coach George Karl is at an age where he admits he's more prone to thinking about retirement than helping to finance a new business.

Still, when friend and businessman Sherif Sakr approached him this year with an idea to open a yoga studio geared toward cancer survivors, Karl — a two-time cancer survivor — said he couldn't pass up the opportunity.

So, when One Yoga opens Oct. 28 in the Denver Tech Center (8101 E. Belleview Ave. in the Marina Square Shopping Center), it will mark Karl's first major investment in a company. One Yoga seeks to break new ground by combining the rapidly growing yoga industry with a greater promotional focus than other studios on survivors of one of the country's most deadly diseases.

"It's a little bit of a leap of faith. We don't really know what kind of response we're going to get," Karl said. "However, the potential for helping people is so great, I don't think we can not take that chance."

Using yoga to help cancer survivors isn't a new idea. A number of local yoga studios offer occasional classes for such people, and some medical facilities — such as Swedish Medical Center in Englewood, where Karl received treatment — train yoga teachers.

But One Yoga will offer a large number of regular cancer-focused classes, in addition to traditional and power yoga sessions, and aim a large portion of its advertising to people who are seeking yoga therapy rather than just workouts, Sakr said.

Sakr — who has a background in engineering, corporate sales and commercial real estate — began learning about yoga therapy earlier this year as he looked at opening a studio, seeing that it alleviated stress and anxiety that can hurt cancer survivors. Then he ran into Karl's life partner, Kim Van Deraa — Sakr's two sons and Karl's youngest daughter go to the same school — and pitched the idea that Karl should be involved.

The Nuggets coach brings with him an endorsement that is "just priceless," Sakr said. Karl will be at the grand opening, will attend a yoga class for cancer survivors at least

once a month and will try to visit the studio on a weekly basis, though he may be less consistent during the NBA season.

Karl also invested an undisclosed amount of money in the project.

Karl first experienced yoga at the University of North Carolina, where he played college basketball. He admits he was reluctant to try it because he thought the fellow students who advocated the concept in the late 1960s were "hippies." But he became a believer.

"It's been around for a long time, but I think we're just understanding if we spend a little time taking care of our spirit and mind, it would be a lot healthier than feeding our bodies," he said.

Sakr said he was inspired by Karl's successful battle with cancer, noting that the coach talked about diet, exercise and positive thinking as being as important as medical treatment. Sakr felt yoga was a perfect weapon to fight not just cancer but also other serious afflictions, he said.



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Denver Nuggets Coach George Karl (center) is opening a yoga studio, One Yoga, aimed at serving cancer survivors. At left is studio manager Colleen Broderick and, at right, Sherif Sakr, One Yoga executive director and founder. Set to open Oct. 28, the studio is located in the Denver Tech Center.

One Yoga will feature teachers trained to work with cancer survivors and an instructor who will offer monthly workshops to help cancer survivors deal with side effects, Sakr said. He and Karl also are exploring partnerships with medical facilities.

One Yoga is larger than most studios — 5,000 square feet, as opposed to the industry average of 1,000 to 4,000 square feet — and has been costlier to build. Sakr said he raised about \$500,000 to open the studio — roughly twice the typical cost — because of the space needed for a wide range of classes, and investing in decor and spaces that he said will promote healing.

If One Yoga performs as hoped, Sakr said he'll start looking for spaces to open new locations, such as in Cherry Creek and downtown Denver, in

as soon as six months.

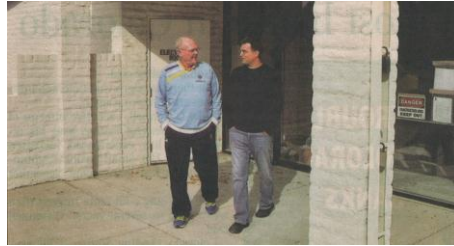
Karl, who has considered having the Nuggets do yoga, said that even with the large number of yoga studios now operating, the need for targeting workouts to specific groups, such as cancer survivors, will grow.

“Even though we’re doing a marvelous job in treating cancer, the amount of people who have cancer is not necessarily dwindling,” he said. “There’s a lot of brilliance and genius in cancer care ... And I think that cancer care is very open to an integrated mentality to how the

patient wants to go through treatment.”

And with his friend Sakr, he said, Karl thinks One Yoga can be successful.

“I thought it would be a fun adventure,” he said.



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Denver Nuggets Coach George Karl and Sherif Sakr, executive director and founder of One Yoga, leave the Denver Tech Center location that is still under construction. Karl admits, while in college, he was reluctant to try yoga because he thought the fellow students who advocated the concept in the late 1960s were “hippies.” But he became a believer.

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