

By Amanda N. Wegner

Often when people are stressed, frustrated, sick, down on their luck, burnt-out, it's hard to see the silver lining. The forest doesn't look any different than the trees. For many people, before they can pull themselves back up, they have to get down, way down, to get a better vantage point of what's possible, what's at the top.

For Marit Sathrum, 46, getting down on her yoga mat has, several times, given her the fortitude to get back up.

Sathrum is the owner of Inner Fire Yoga Center for Wellness, which recently moved to a custom-built, eco-friendly location on University Avenue. Since opening the original studio in October 2002, nearly 9,500 people have taken classes at Inner Fire Yoga (formerly Bikram Yoga Madison), and that number continues to grow with monthly donation-based introductory classes, workshops and a growing community awareness of yoga's vast benefits.

### Changed outlook

Sathrum first found yoga in California in 1993. This former investment banker was living a stress-filled life, and her body was paying for it.

"My job was incredibly stressful, and my body showed all the signs and symptoms," says Sathrum, who's originally from Northfield, Minn.

Then one day her roommate, an extreme athlete nicknamed "Rock" who was nursing a major injury, came home hot and sweaty. Figuring he'd been working out against doctor's orders, Sathrum started to scold him, until Rock explained he'd just come from Bikram yoga at the nearby Bikram's Yoga College of India.

"I didn't believe him," says Sathrum. "I thought there was no way he could be that worked up from yoga."

(There are literally hundreds of yoga styles, but Bikram yoga, which is done in a heated room, consists of 26 set yoga postures, or asanas.)

So she checked it out for herself. "I went and I never stopped. I had felt so unsatisfied before, and as a result of yoga, my whole outlook changed."

Yoga brought Sathrum, who has a master's degree in business administration, such inner peace and stability, she decided to start shifting gears and took a 500-hour teacher training program in 1997. She found a less-stressful, more-flexible job and started teaching twice a week.

"Life," she says, "was good."

But when we're up, life has a way of bringing us down.

In August 2000, Sathrum's son was born in California, and just over a year later in September 2001, as the world mourned 9/11, Sathrum and her son's father split.

"It made me take a close look at life, and I decided to move back to the Midwest to raise my son," she says.

### Serendipity

While visiting Madison in June 2002, looking for a job and house, Sathrum saw a "For Lease" sign as she drove by what would become Inner Fire's first location on University Avenue.

"It was always my intention to own a yoga studio, but I didn't think I could do it financially. Yet it all worked out. It was serendipitous."

Bikram yoga wasn't new to Madison (a studio on the east side has offered it for many years), and in the first six months, nearly 2,000 people walked through Inner Fire's doors. The first time Sathrum offered free yoga in January 2003, over 300 people attended, packing the classes.

"In hindsight, it was an overwhelming response by the community."

But again, where there are ups, there are downs, especially when there's a small business involved.

In December 2005, Sathrum, still a single mother, adopted her then-five-month-old daughter from Ethiopia. Though the studio experienced great success initially, it faltered after her daughter came home as Sathrum was keenly focused on mother-daughter bonding — not yoga or the business of yoga. In fact, Sathrum considered "throwing in the towel," but she wasn't ready to give up her dream yet. She hired a business coach — appropriately titled The Yoga Business Coach — and not only got her studio back on track, but rekindled her love of yoga.

"The first commitment Alon [Sagee, Sathrum's coach] requested of me was to rededicate myself to a daily yoga practice, and that made a world of difference," she says. "If I don't practice yoga, I go crazy. When I do practice, everything else in business and life seems to flow more smoothly."

### Committed to community

In 2007, the studio was renamed to embrace the growing number of yoga styles offered, including Bikram, Power Flow, Inner Fire Fusion (a beginning flow class) and Yin, a restorative yoga style. All classes are done in a heated room, with Bikram yoga classes heated to a greater degree than the others.

The new studio opened in late January and now boasts two practice rooms, showers, a retail boutique and more. Sathrum is also diversifying her lines of business; a massage practice, Vitality Massage, is already open, the retail offerings continue to grow, and a wider array of workshop offerings are an integral part of the schedule. Soon to come are private yoga therapy and a yoga teacher training program.

The new location was built with green principles, including the use of cork flooring, low-VOC paints, re-used building materials, a highly efficient ERV, or Energy Recovery Ventilation system that helps recycle heat, and more.

Concern for the environment and yoga, says Sathrum, go hand in hand. So much so that it's an integral part of Inner Fire's mission statement.

"Being green is an absolute necessity for being human," she says. "If we continue on a destructive path and are not mindful of our choices, then our world and our future are in dire straits."

Additionally, Sathrum is committed to this community for the long haul.

"I knew I was in this for another 20-plus years. Building my dream space to work and practice yoga has always been in the plans."

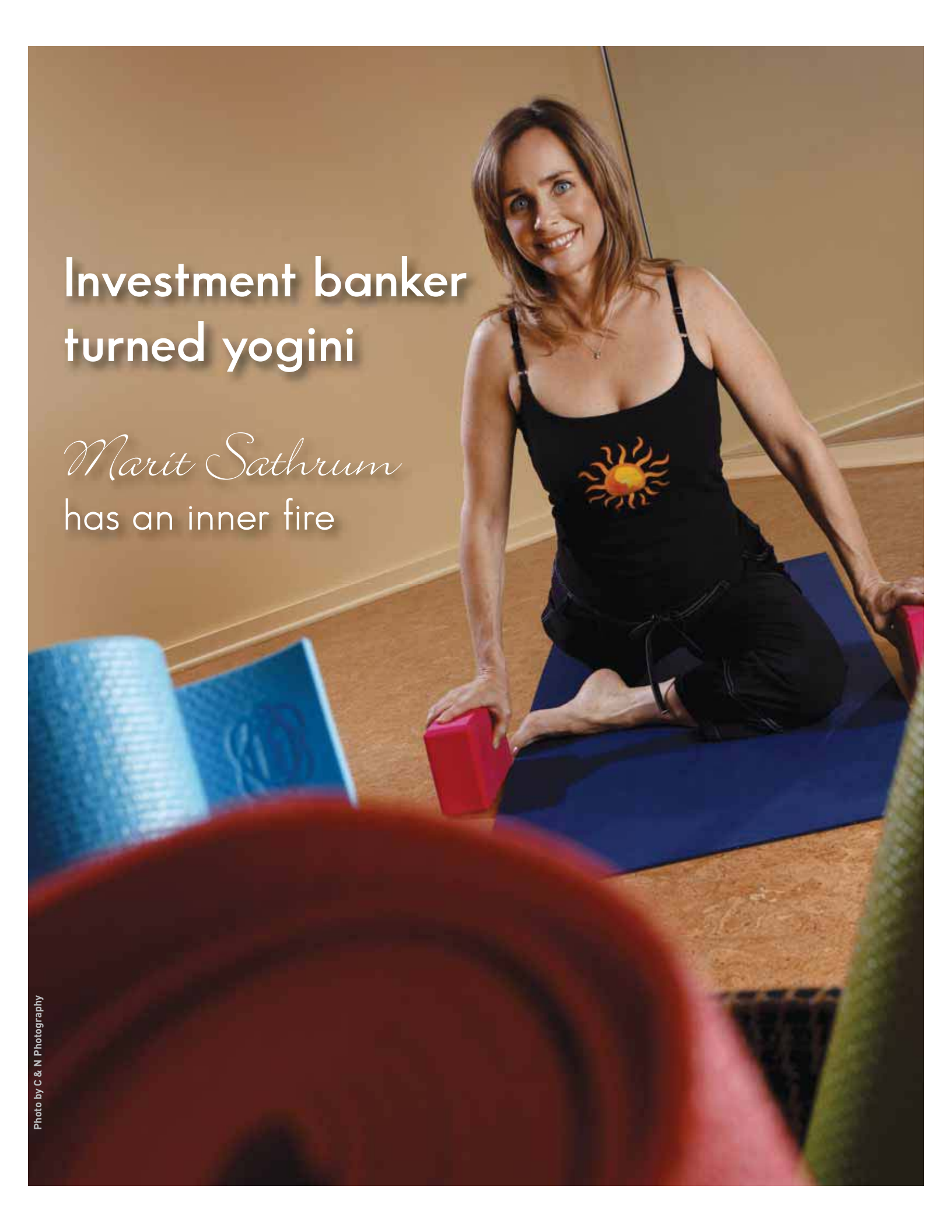
But more important than diversification, eco-friendliness and business coaches is the sense of community that Sathrum's yoga studio has cultivated. To date, proceeds to nonprofits from community events, introductory yoga classes, workshops and more total over \$8,000, and Sathrum donates gift certificates for yoga to local charity auctions.

"This is a community center. Many feel this is their sanctuary from the hustle and bustle of life, and when we are happy, calm, grounded, we can cultivate peace in the world. Our vibration extends outside these walls."

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- Marit Sathrum



Madison writer Amanda N. Wegner is also a dedicated yogini. She finishes her 200-hour yoga teacher training this month. Contact her at [awegner@writerscramp-communications.com](mailto:awegner@writerscramp-communications.com).



# Investment banker turned yogini

*Marit Sathrum*  
has an inner fire