

Parrish Event Benefits Donna Karan's UZIT Program

BY KELLY LAFFEY

If you're inclined to follow traditional dress codes, then the final week to wear white is upon us. Don the quintessential summer color for a cause on Wednesday, August 27, as Hamptonites are invited to come together at the Lolë White Tour at the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill. The evening of yoga benefits the Parrish and the Urban Zen Integrative Therapy Program at Southampton Hospital.

The Urban Zen Integrative Therapy program, or UZIT, is the brainchild of designer and East Hampton resident Donna Karan. UZIT is an innovative initiative that strives to fill a void in healthcare, treating the whole patient—

including people indirectly affected by the trauma—and not just the disease. Famed yoga instructors Rodney Yee and Colleen Saidman Yee, of Yoga Shanti in Sag Harbor, direct the UZIT program and will lead the Parrish event.

Karan first conceived of the UZIT program when her late husband Stephan Weiss was stricken with lung cancer. "I was fortunate to have all these people to take care of my husband, and I realized, who's taking care of these people? Where was the 'care' in healthcare? It was the missing element," says Karan, a noted philanthropist who founded the annual Super Saturday, which benefits the Ovarian Cancer Research Fund, in 1998. "I realized I had been a part of all these disease-related events, but at



Daniel Gonzalez

Karan at the recent Paddle for Pink Party in Sag Harbor

the end of the day we're all patients. We're all loved ones." The UZIT program has been a part of Southampton Hospital since 2009.

Trained Urban Zen Integrative Therapists employ yoga therapy, Reiki, essential oil therapy, nutrition and contemplative care to treat the wellbeing of the body as a whole. Patients are given information on the program upon admittance to Southampton Hospital. Those who aren't in the hospital can drop in to one of the Urban Zen classes at Yoga Shanti.

"We need to up the game, take care of the faculty, admins, these are the tools that make so much of a difference," says Rodney. Patients who have opted into the program have reported decreased anxiety, more regular sleep schedules and better pain management, among other benefits.

"For Rodney and me, [having the program at Southampton Hospital] is so beautiful because it's our community," says Colleen. "We get direct feedback, so we can really see the impact."

The program, which is available to people at the hospital free of charge, is funded by Karan and her Urban Zen Foundation, outside donations and matching donations from Southampton Hospital—this is why events like the one at the Parrish are so important to UZIT's sustainability. The ultimate goal, as Rodney outlines, is that enough research on the program will be done to have it deemed an integral part of the hospital, and eventually to have the hospital fund it.

Thus far, the marriage of eastern healing techniques with western medicine has been both effective and well-received. "Patients have reported reduced stress and an overall improved sense of well-being during the course of pre-surgical care and recovery or treatment for medical illness," says Fred Weinbaum, MD Executive Vice President for Operations and Chief Medical Officer of the UZIT program. "It has been a welcome (Continued on page 58)

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Karan *(Continued from page 44)*

source of comfort and relief.”

A part of the Lolë White Tour for peace, the event at the Parrish will bring together 300 participants under the guidance of Colleen and Rodney, taking part in yoga to the tune of live music. When you bring “creativity, artistry and yoga together, the next dimension is created,” says Karan of the event, which is open to the community.

Karan first took a yoga class when she was 18, citing



The Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill

an initial desire to connect with her body so she could move like legendary modern dancer Martha Graham. But she soon found inspiration in yoga, the connection to the body and the community of consciousness and change that yoga champions. “If any world is going to solve the problems in the world today, that’s the yoga world,” says Karan. “I’ve been gifted. A blessing has been given to me and I have to give back.”

The greatest benefit of yoga, and the gift of UZIT, is that it allows you to calm

your mind to live in the present. “The gift of life is happening right now, and unfortunately in life we’re looking at the past or future,” says Rodney. “Yoga releases tension in the body and teaches you to meditate with your mind.”

“Music is therapy also,” says Colleen, referring to the live music that will play throughout the class. Like yoga, “it gets into the body and breaks up that stuff that’s hard and stuck that keeps you from loving fully and living in the moment.” It creates a community-minded environment where participants are responding to the music, and the musicians are responding to the participants.

During savasana, certified Urban Zen Integrative Therapists will be performing Reiki, a healing technique administered by touch, to the participants. When class is over, participants will be able to keep the yellow mats provided by Lolë, an activewear brand. All who take part should wear white.

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“Come take care of yourself and pay it forward for someone else. It’s the perfect message out there,” says Rodney. “It’s what we’re all about when it comes to conscious consumerism.” The UZIT program is one of many benefitting from Donna Karan’s Urban Zen Foundation. The Urban Zen stores in Sag Harbor and in New York City support causes championed by the Urban Zen Foundation, including UZIT.

Yoga Shanti and Urban Zen are both located in Sag Harbor—Karan says it was her daughter Gabby who first convinced her to open a shop next door to her Tutto il Giorno restaurant. But the move created a community within the larger East End community, as the Karan and the Yeas now spend their mornings together, beginning, of course, with a yoga class. 🧘

Visit lolewomen.com/hamptons to purchase tickets for the White Tour, held at the Parrish Art Museum, 279 Montauk Highway, Water Mill on Wednesday, August 27 at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$100, and the class is open to people of all yoga abilities. To make a donation to the Urban Zen Integrative Therapy Program at Southampton Hospital, visit uzit.urbanzen.org/donate.

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