



Svetlana Baklanova

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOEL LERNER

## Woman champions exercise technique popular in Eastern Europe

■ BY ZARA HUSAINI

When she teaches a HORA class, Svetlana Baklanova greets each student by name. She may even delay the session for a few minutes if one participant is running late.

"I feel that they are part of my family," she says.

According to Baklanova, the benefits of HORA — which has similarities to yoga and often includes dance — include its ability to energize participants, increase productivity, and even alleviate depression. The sole U.S. representative of HORA, Baklanova didn't plan on bringing a new form of fitness to the Chicagoland area — but that's what she's doing.

"I was not thinking about creating something good for others. I was really thinking about myself and my family," she says of her decision to begin practicing HORA nine years ago.

The 42-year-old — who's originally from St. Petersburg, Russia — earned two degrees in fashion design and planned to pursue that line before choosing HORA, which is popular in Eastern Europe. Baklanova hopes to bring HORA to more Chicago suburbs in the next five years (she once taught in Evanston and offers classes just outside of Northbrook in Wheeling). In Chicago, classes can be taken on Wells

Street in the Loop. They cost anywhere from \$15-\$40. Each session has around a dozen participants.

Jenya Steinberg, a 38-year-old Glenview resident, started taking HORA classes three years ago.

"I heard from different people how great it is, how great they feel after it, how much their lives have changed," she says.

Her verdict? "I have more energy during the day. I think [Svetlana] does it such a way that we learn about ourselves."

Baklanova agrees that HORA has the ability to energize its practitioners. She also cites its incredible calming effect, saying that rocking movements mimic the motion infants feel while in the mother's womb. Baklanova adds it can keep its participants fit, helping them lose weight and build strength.

The exercises in HORA — often taught in 20-minute increments and occasionally while one sits in a chair — rarely induces sweat or leaves one sore. Yet Baklanova, a thin woman sporting a youthful look, swears her only exercise is the HORA classes she teaches.

"I saw the effect of me being younger, needing less sleep, needing less energy, less food. I was a new type of human being," she says of her experiences with HORA. "To me, it's not a miracle. It's my reality." ■

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