

Santa Cruz County Stories: Lee Holden, Qigong master

By Justine DaCosta

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Going with the flow comes naturally to Lee Holden.

The Qigong master and founding director of Santa Cruz Integrative Medicine and Chi Center grew up in a family where the power of energy was celebrated.

Born in Mountain View, Holden's father, a judge, and his mother, a yoga instructor, taught him and his siblings how to connect their minds and bodies.

"Everybody in my family was into energy and spirituality," he said. "We'd all meditate together, teach each other."

Now he's passing along this lesson to his own children, twin toddlers and an infant, as well as the Santa Cruz community and beyond. He teaches Qigong at the center as well as at workshops worldwide. He also hosts Qigong shows on community television.

Holden, who's lived in Santa Cruz since 1998, began seriously studying Qigong and Eastern medicine while attending UC Berkeley, where he'd received a partial soccer scholarship. An injury nearly sidelined him for good, but after a few weeks of Qigong and acupuncture, he was back and ready to play.

"It was amazing, and I've been sold ever since," he said.

Holden graduated in 1992, earning a degree in psychology, then traveled to Asia, where he worked as a ghostwriter for Master Mantak Chia, covering topics on Qigong and Taoism. During his

travels, which included stays in Thailand, Indonesia, China and Japan, Holden learned ancient bodywork practices, such as Thai massage and abdominal massage.

"It was absolutely amazing,"

he said.

The breathing techniques and body movements used in Qigong help strengthen the mind and body, and create a sort of euphoria that can be addictive in the best way possible. Holden hopes to soon start a Qigong class for children, opening the gates for a new generation of what Holden calls "chi junkies."

"You just feel really good doing it."

He believes when it comes to a person's well-being, there is a place for both Eastern and Western practices. As a founder of the Chi Center, which offers everything from acupressure and acupuncture to Qigong and massage therapy, Holden and his team teach people how to care for themselves.

"It's empowering for people to learn how to heal themselves from within," he said.

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Getting to know

Lee Holden

Birthday: Feb. 3, 1969

Family: Wife of 12 years, Lisa, whom he met in one of his Qigong classes; daughters Lainey and Maile, 3, and Kyla, 6 months.

Flowing Out: When he's not practicing Qigong, Holden enjoys meditating, practicing yoga and riding mountain bikes at UC Santa Cruz and Wilder Ranch State Park. He's also come to love stand-up paddle boarding.

"It's like Qigong on the water," he said. "It requires balance, you have to go with the flow of the water, your legs have to be strong, you have to be centered."

Working: When he was 15, Holden landed a busboy job at Steamer's Grillhouse in Los Gatos. Shortly after starting, he filled someone's water glass until it overflowed all over the man's lap. 'I thought, maybe this work isn't for me,' he said. He went on to work construction and teach at soccer camps during his summers, and was slated to become a bank teller fresh out of college. He traveled to Asia instead.

School: Holden graduated from Los Gatos High School, and earned a bachelor's from UC Berkeley and a master's from Five Branches University.

Fun Fact: Holden started playing soccer at age 5 and traveled to England at 10 to play on a select team. He went on to play semi-professionally.

Websites: Holden's CDs, DVDs and book, '7 Minutes of Magic,' can be found at www.leeholden.com. For more on the Santa Cruz Integrative Medicine and Chi Center, visit www.santacruzchicenter.com.

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