

Cirque stars train with local fitness guru

By Eric Leins

When performers of arguably the most physically demanding circus on Earth take to the road for sometimes up to two consecutive years, they have to leave a lot behind. But something they can't do without is an appropriate workout regimen.

As Cirque du Soleil's Dralion show winds through San Diego, it is a Del Mar trainer that has been made responsible for keeping the acrobats, contortionists, dancers and other athletic artists in tip-top shape. Julian Littleford, owner of JL Body Conditioning in Del Mar, was cho-

sen last month as the Pilates trainer for Cirque du Soleil.

Pilates (pronounced pill-lah-tees) is an exercise program that aligns the body by strengthening its core muscles.

"Like any athlete (the Cirque du Soleil performers) do a lot of repetitive motion. And when you have that, muscle groups get longer and out of alignment," explains Littleford, a former principal dancer with the prestigious Martha Graham Dance Company.

"It strengthens you from the inside out," Littleford adds.

Although Pilates **See Cirque, Page 18**



Del Mar physical fitness trainer Julian Littleford works with Cirque du Soleil aerial artist Colette Morrow. Littleford was hired by the circus to train its athletes in Pilates, a body-strengthening and body-alignment exercise program.

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exercises look gentle and non-rigorous, they in fact demand a lot of concentration and vigor. Incorporating both Western-influenced muscle activity with Eastern-style breathing techniques, the program, Littleford says, can be used by anyone.

Littleford's students range in age from 7 to 86 years of age. But their athleticism is sometimes even more diverse, spanning from injured athletes to pregnant women and the wheelchair bound.

Littleford, 42, is a natural fit for Cirque du Soleil, which combines athleticism with

artistry in its world-renowned show. During his dance career Littlefield had worked with a variety of artists, including Mikhail Baryshnikov, whom he will introduce May 11 when he and his dance company take the stage at the Escondido Center for the Performing Arts.

"We chose Littleford due to his expertise of whole body training through the Pilates method and his many years as a master Pilates instructor," said Kathy Renaud, assistant artistic director for Cirque du Soleil. "His background in ballet is most appropriate for our acrobatic performers,"

Born in Britain, Littleford moved to San Diego in 1990. He has been doing Pilates exercises for 25 years and even founded the Physical Mind Institute, a center, now based in New York, that trains Pilates trainers.

"There is a common connection between dancing and athletics," Littleford observes, "and that connection is Pilates."

JL Body Conditioning is located at 1412 Camino del Mar. For more information, call (858) 259-1682.