

inspiration



# EMPOWERING WOMEN From the Inside-Out

by Kim Childs

Leadership coach and yoga teacher Sierra Bender is on a mission to help women embody their feminine power from the inside-out. On April 21, Bender will lead a Day of Empowerment for women of all ages at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU), in Chicago. Bender, author of *Goddess to the Core* and creator of Boot Camp for Goddesses retreats, will employ the Sierra Bender Empowerment Method (SBEM) during the daylong event. Using Bender's 4 Body Fit approach, the method aims to boost levels of well-being; spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically.

"I want to see women spiritually connected with a sense of self, mentally focused and calm, emotionally

intelligent and physically strong and confident," says Bender. "Many women today think they're empowered, but they're trying to prove their worthiness through material success and titles, instead of embracing who they are in their core. They're basically competing with men and becoming imitation men."

Bender cites disturbing rates of depression, obesity, heart disease and domestic and sexual violence among women as strong motivations for bringing the SBEM to as many groups as she can. The method was tested at the American University in Washington, D.C., where more than 200 women ages 14 to 75 participated in a study that measured levels of empowerment

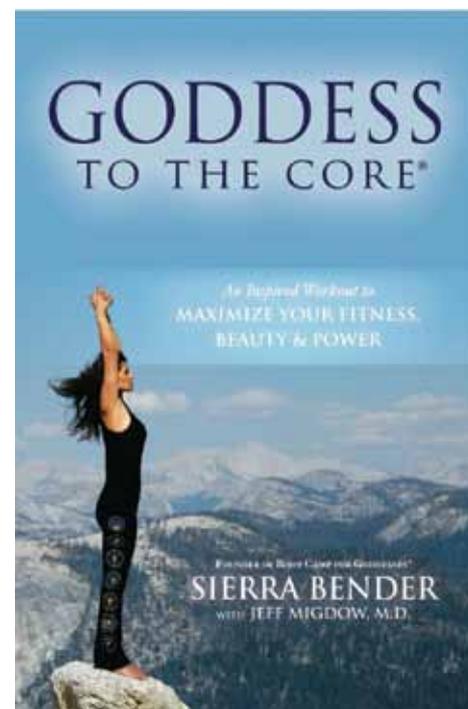
before and after the SBEM. Bender says the results showed a higher than 75 percent growth rate in self-esteem, power, leadership and community activism among study participants who learned the SBEM, regardless of age, race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

"This research proves that women can take control of their physical and mental health and break through to new levels of empowerment and wellness," says Bender, noting that women at the Chicago event will be similarly assessed before and after the program. "At the end of the day they should be claiming their space, standing tall and feeling worthy, powerful, and feminine," she says.

The Day of Empowerment at



 Sierra Bender



NEIU will include yoga and fitness activities, board breaking and exercises that teach the SBEM and put it into action. In bringing her work to college campuses, Bender seeks to prevent young women from becoming victims of violence. "Statistics show that one in four women under the age of 18 is sexually assaulted or abused, and that relationship violence is alarmingly high among young women today," she says. "These women are the next generation, and I want to see them living from their core power."

Bender says she hopes to encourage new thinking and leadership among college-age women and help to lower rates of depression and suicide on campus. Aiming even higher, she hopes to influence national public policy. "I want to see better laws to protect women from domestic violence. Those currently in place are not working, or the number of incidents wouldn't be so high," says Bender. "I also want to see preventative courses for girls and women on how to stop domestic violence and date rape from happening in the first place."

Bender's teaching career grew out of personal experience. In her early 30s, she was a successful personal trainer, model and wife, when a misdiagnosed ectopic pregnancy ruptured her uterus. The crisis sent Bender on a journey of healing and personal transformation. "Surviving that near-death experience gave me this deep, inner knowing about why I went through all my pain and suffering in my past, from sexual abuse and abusive relationships to eating disorders and problems with drugs and alcohol," she recalls. "I'd put myself in all of these situations to punish myself, and I didn't know my true power." Bender went on to study with shamans, yoga teachers and health professionals that helped her to develop the SBEM, which has made its way to the Marine Corps, the Harvard Law School and Girls, Inc., among other organizations.

Bender reports that she encounters issues of disempowerment and low self-esteem among women at all levels of society. Her vision of the ideal new woman is, "... a combination of goddess and warrior who claims her worth, takes command of her space, sculpts her shape and balances her emotions and intellect, while remaining in her feminine essence." The world would be a better place, says Bender, if women led from a place of power, cultivated from within.

*The Day of Empowerment with Sierra Bender is sponsored by Natural Awakenings magazine, Heaven Meets Earth Yoga Studio and Conscious Living Center, and is part of the Goddess to the Core Tour 2012-2013. Cost: \$25 NEIU students with valid ID, \$40 college and high school students (ages 16-plus) with valid ID, \$100 non-college students. Location: 5500 N. St. Louis Ave., Chicago. For more information, including registration, visit SierraBenderChicago.Eventbrite.com. Read more about Bender at SierraBender.com.*

*Kim Childs is a writer and creativity coach in Boston. Connect at KimChilds.com. See ad on page 5.*

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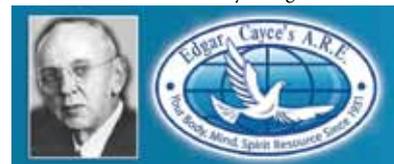
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