

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

They'll rub you the right way at FIU spa

■ A spa based at FIU combines healing and relaxation techniques to give customers a spiritual experience.

BY SUE ARROWSMITH
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Hidden inside Florida International University's south campus, amid the fact-based world of academia, there is a place that taps into mysticism to heal the mind, body and soul.

Isa Ruiz and her husband, David Marino, graduates of the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, opened Waves Spa in 2004. Their healing center combines hands-on treatment with intuition, spiritual and psychological aspects.

Healing, Ruiz said, can be offered in many ways, from a simple conversation to chelation therapy, a process that involves moving the hands over the body to discern an individual's energy.

"Through their voice or the way a person sits, the Brennan School teaches you to take cues from your client," Ruiz said.

The spa has about 10,000 clients and received numerous accolades, including Best Massage in Miami and Best Facial in Miami by the Citysearch Guide to Miami since 2007.

It specializes in various types of massages and skin care, but its most unusual service is a rare find in South Florida.

ROLFING

Marino, 32, is one of only a few certified rolfing practitioners in the area. The method, also known as structural integration, aligns and strengthens the body by repositioning the connective tissue. Sometimes, he gets "psychic hits" as he works on clients.

"Dave is a very interesting man. He can pick up on subtle details. I learned things about myself I didn't know, things that maybe were repressed," said Jason Barger, a Coral Gables Fire



PHOTOS BY PATRICIA LAYLLE/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

THE OWNERS: David and Isa Ruiz Marino, both licensed massage therapists, own and operate the Waves Spa at FIU. Three years ago they got married in the back room of the spa.

'Dave . . . can pick up on subtle details. I learned things about myself I didn't know, things that maybe were repressed.'

- JASON BARGER,
Coral Gables firefighter

Rescue officer.

Having emotions bottled up is something Marino understands. As a child and young adult with severe dyslexia, there was a time when he couldn't even help himself.

Marino was born in Bergen County, N.J., to a wealthy family of Italian descent. While his peers were contemplating which Ivy League school to attend, he was reading and writing on a third-grade level.



SATISFIED CUSTOMER: David Marino uses forearm during a rolfing session with firefighter Jason Barger.

In school he felt lost, so he developed a sixth sense to "feel" his surroundings.

"When teachers would write

notes on the board I could not read or copy them down. I had to feel what the teacher was talking about," Marino said.

In high school, an administrator recommended he seek help from a Brennan psychologist. He felt an instant connection to the healing the specialist offered.

At 19, Marino flew to Peru to attend a healing workshop led by Caroline Myss, a medical intuitive and author of several books. The only teenage jock among a group of mostly middle-aged women, Marino caught her attention and she took him in as an apprentice.

At the same time, Ruiz was struggling to save her own life.

THYROID CANCER

Ruiz was diagnosed with thyroid cancer at age 23 after graduating from Boston University with a bachelor's in broadcasting/film studies. Doctors removed the right lobe of her

thyroid, but she felt there was something more lurking behind the illness.

"I knew there was something deeper that wasn't being tended to. I had a longing for healing," said Ruiz, now 37.

Ruiz came across a Brennan brochure at her acupuncturist's office. Within a couple of months, she enrolled and later met Marino.

One of Myss' books, *Anatomy of the Spirit*, also helped her. The book included a chart that linked thyroid problems to the fifth chakra, or energy point, which houses personal expression.

When she was a child, Ruiz said she did not speak or express herself because of emotional problems. She believes this "blocked" state caused the cancer to develop over time.

"My thyroid cancer has been my greatest teacher, leaving me with the gift of self-awareness and self-care," Ruiz wrote in a personal essay.

After they met at Brennan, Marino continued his studies at the Guild for Structural Integration to become a certified rolfing practitioner.

CHOICE WAS CLEAR

When time came for the couple to choose a location for their spa, the choice was a no-brainer.

"I knew the benefits of being on campus," said Ruiz, who helped her father open Santi beauty salon at FIU in 1999.

"It's a really great timing in someone's life, especially when they are discovering themselves."

Three years ago, the couple married in the back room of their spa. They had a notary draw up a marriage license days before she walked down the hallway of the spa on her father's arm.

The simple ceremony, and its unconventional fashion, was fitting for two people from different worlds, who overcame personal obstacles and found hope in a life of healing.