



## Sunni Nutt

*Essential Yoga Studio*

*The root of yoga is yoking - the remembering of connection between mind, body, and spirit. At Essential, we extend that understanding beyond the mat by treating community as an essential part of individual and collective wellbeing. Our work centers on creating spaces where people feel connected, supported, and resourced—both within our studio and throughout Springfield. Essential provides yoga through a trauma-informed, student-centered lens that prioritizes accessibility and adaptation. We offer a wide range of class styles and emphasize that each body shapes its own practice. To further reduce barriers to self-care, we offer time-based, half-price scholarships for students experiencing financial hardship, ensuring access to self-care during their most challenging seasons. Community connection is a core part of our mission. Twice each month, we host low-to-no cost community events open to all, focused on introspection, spirituality, and belonging.*

*These gatherings are designed to share leadership, foster meaningful connection, and provide accessible wellness experiences regardless of income or whether someone attends Essential regularly. Beyond our studio walls, Essential actively partners with the Springfield community. Students and staff volunteer monthly at Ozarks Food Harvest, we regularly host fundraising classes and donation drives for local nonprofits, and we collaborate with women-owned and small businesses both on- and off-site. We also consistently provide financial sponsorships and in-kind donations for nonprofit fundraisers and community events. Through these efforts, Essential supports Springfield not only as a wellness studio, but as a community partner committed to care, connection, and collective wellbeing.*

*At Essential, excellence is defined by consistency, care, and follow-through, not just intention or performance. We have high standards for service quality, student experience, and professionalism, and I believe listening is only meaningful when it leads to action. To support this, I formally gather student feedback through bi-annual surveys in June and January and, importantly, I close the loop. After each survey, I share a report-out with our community that summarizes what I've heard and outlines the changes I am making in response. This past June's feedback directly informed adjustments to our class schedule this fall, facility improvements this winter, and built transparency and trust around recent price changes to support these updates. Our students know their voices matter because they see the results. Excellence also shows up in how we welcome and support each student at Essential; we are intentionally inclusive, trauma-informed, and student-centered and we emphasize consent, autonomy, and accessibility in every class, reinforcing that your body shapes your practice, not the other way around. Students regularly share that they feel safe, seen, and that they belong from the moment they walk through our doors. New students receive personal, non-automated support directly from me through thoughtful check-ins. In the small moments, such as remembering names, checking in after class, proactive communication, and reliable operations, my teachers and I demonstrate professionalism AND warmth in equal measure. In my three years of ownership, Essential has grown by listening deeply, acting intentionally, and consistently following through for our community.*

*At Essential, innovation and leadership show up through responsive, human-centered decision-making and a willingness to evolve alongside our community. Rather than relying on industry trends alone, I lead by listening deeply to our students and adapting our offerings, systems, and culture based on real needs. One of the primary ways I demonstrate this is through intentionally collecting and sharing student feedback. This approach has guided creative problem-solving around class scheduling, facility improvements, and pricing adjustments, ensuring that change is both strategic and trust-building. By inviting students into the "why" behind decisions, I foster shared leadership and long-term buy-in. I also prioritize leadership through presence. New students receive personal outreach directly from me, allowing me to identify concerns early, offer support, and tailor their experience. I also check in regularly with ongoing members to ensure our offerings continue to meet evolving needs. This hands-on approach strengthens retention, deepens community connection, and sets a relational standard for our team. From a teaching and cultural perspective, I lead with a trauma-informed, inclusive philosophy that centers autonomy, consent, and accessibility. By reinforcing that each student defines their own practice, I cultivate a safe, empowering environment that many students say feels fundamentally different from other studios. I support this leadership personally through ongoing education, training, and spiritual development, ensuring Essential continues to grow with integrity while modeling a people-first approach within the wellness industry.*

*At Essential, our work is guided by a core set of values that prioritize humanity, integrity, and care in every interaction. These values shape how we show up daily for our students, our team, and our broader community. First and foremost, we lead with respect for the individual and their life experience. I believe each person's experience, body, and needs are valid. This shows up in our trauma-informed, student-centered approach, where consent, autonomy, and accessibility are embedded into every class and interaction. Students are encouraged to define their own practice, and our environment is designed to feel safe, welcoming, and inclusive from the moment they arrive. We also value connection and transparency. We treat students as whole people, not transactions, which means learning names, checking in personally, and communicating clearly and proactively. Feedback is welcomed and acted on, reinforcing trust and shared responsibility within our community. With our teachers, I lead with support, professionalism, and mutual respect. I hire qualified, certified instructors and foster a culture of collaboration, clear expectations, and open communication. I aim to model leadership that is present, responsive, and grounded, setting the tone for how we care for one another and ourselves. Finally, I value consistency and integrity: doing what we say we will do as humans and as a business.*

*Whether communicating changes, honoring commitments, or showing up reliably day after day, these values ensure Essential operates with warmth, clarity, and care every day and every time.*

*This season of my business is meaningful because it represents a full alignment between how I live and lead and what I value most. While I've owned Essential for three years, March 2025 marked the beginning of my first season leading the studio full time after stepping away from a long-term career in nonprofit leadership. That transition required real courage: financial uncertainty, an identity shift, and the choice to release a path that looked "successful" in order to follow what felt true. Yoga has always been more than a practice to me; it is a philosophy and way of living rooted in presence, integrity, service, and self-study. This season has allowed me to practice embodied leadership and grounding business decisions in those same principles. Leading from the mat and behind-the-scenes has strengthened our culture and operations, even as my personal income has decreased. It has been a worthwhile tradeoff, and I'm proud to model a life rooted in purpose, balance, and service rather than status or comfort alone. What I'm most proud of right now is our community! With more focused attention this year, I've watched students show up for one another AND for me, for local nonprofits, and for Springfield through partnerships, fundraisers, and volunteer efforts. Essential feels revitalized energetically, financially, and relationally. While this growth is collective, I'm learning to honor my role in nurturing it, and to celebrate the courage it took to choose this path. I am deeply grateful to be here.*



Essential Yoga Studio’s owner, Sunni Nutt, is a long-time resident of North Springfield. As she obtained her Bachelor’s degree in Psychology and Gender Studies from Missouri State University and her Master’s degree in Nonprofit & Civic Leadership from Drury University, Sunni embarked on a 15-year career in nonprofit leadership, including domestic violence advocacy at Harmony House and youth development support at Boys & Girls Clubs of Springfield.

After practicing yoga for twelve years, Sunni obtained her yoga teaching certificate in August 2021 and purchased her long-time yoga home in November 2022. After two-plus years with a foot in both nonprofit leadership and entrepreneurship, Sunni made the courageous move to lean into full-time leadership of Essential Yoga Studio and stepped away from her nonprofit career.

In support of her nonprofit roots, Sunni currently serves as the Board President for Ozarks Literacy Council and Board Secretary for Plotline and is employed part-time as Executive Projects Assistant for Leadership Springfield.

When she's not living and breathing yoga, Sunni can usually be found at home; she and her husband are slowly cultivating a mini homestead with two dogs, three cats, and a small flock of chickens. She is intrigued by gluten-free baking and vegan cooking, gardening, “kindergarten crafts,” Taylor Swift, and nature and reads voraciously. Sunni values whimsy and wonder, accessibility and a sense of belonging, and a healthy dose of sunshine in all of her interactions and is grateful to live a life aligned with those values.