

The Art of Dance

Physical, Social Benefits Abound

by Amanda N. Wegner

Have two left feet? No rhythm? Think you can't dance?

Think again.

"Dancing is like walking to music," says Deneen Carmichael, co-owner of Tempo Dance Studio, which offers Latin and ballroom dancesport instruction.

"Anyone can learn to dance," adds Marlene Cordes, owner of Dance Easy, which specializes in partner dance, such as foxtrot, country two-step and more.

With an abundance of quality dance studios and instructors in the Madison area, learning the art of dance is as easy as putting one foot in front of the other.

You can dance

"We hear it literally ten times a day: 'I can't dance,'" says Carmichael. "But we've never met anybody who couldn't learn to dance."

While Cordes and Carmichael get their fair share of couples preparing for their weddings, the average dancer at their respective studios is between 35 and 55.

In reality though, with the growing interest in dance as a form of exercise (thanks *Dancing with the Stars*) as well as the social rewards, the age range of those hitting the dance floors at local studios "pretty much

Carl Jesperson and Irene Durbak.



Co-owner and instructor John Abrams of Tempo Dance Studio teaches the grapevine to his students.



Above: Carl Jespersen and Cathy Mackin.

covers young adulthood to senior life,” says Cordes.

Carmichael emphasizes that natural ability isn't a requirement to learn how to dance. With a range of options available at each studio (private lessons, semi-private, group lessons and, at Tempo, social dances), people can find the mode of learning that works best for them.

“It doesn't take years and years and years to learn,” says Cordes. “Once you understand the basic structure, you can be out and dancing and having fun.”

Of course, that requires some practice.

“It's not magic and all of a sudden, you can dance,” says Carmichael. “You have to work at it. I can't underemphasize that it's a challenge, but one that's rewarding and fun.”

What's more is that almost anyone, regardless of physical ability, can dance; Cordes has taught blind individuals, people with injuries and physical disabilities and more.

Get physical

With its constant movement, dancing can be a great workout.

Even if you're not moving at the pace or with the voracity of celebrities on *Dancing with the Stars*, dancing offers a cardiovascular workout.

“It's amazing what a great workout dancing is,” says Carmichael, “even if you're not at an advanced level. Even if you're waltzing

and moving for the duration of a song, that's three to five minutes of sustained movement.”

Dancing is also good for muscle tone and can help improve posture.

“People will come back after a lesson and say, ‘I'm sore. What is that?’ It's because you're using the body and muscles in a different way,” says Carmichael.

It can even be something of a physical therapy, says Cordes. “The nice thing about dancing is that you can scale it up or scale it down depending on limitations. And a lot of times, dancing can help develop muscles and tendons around an injury.”

More than movement

There are additional benefits to dancing, many of which dancers might never be aware, says Cordes.

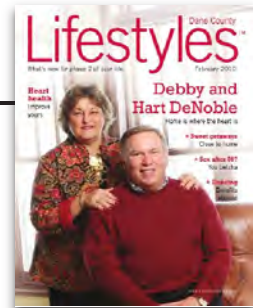
“Many times when people first come, they may not have identified the other benefits they can get from dancing, other than just learning how to dance. But learning to dance gives you a sense of accomplishment, improves self-esteem, confidence, discipline and so much more.”

And because dancing brings together a diverse group of people who love music and dance, friendships are sure to form on the dance floor.

“Dancers anywhere tend to be very friendly people,” says Carmichael. “They are passionate about [dance] and excited to in-

roduce other people to it. A lot of friendships develop and evolve on the dance floor.”

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