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FEATURED POPULAR

Let's dance: Ballroom, line and square dancing still popular around Frederick County

By Crystal Schelle cschelle@newspost.com
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Square dancers, from left, Bonnie Rohr, Dennis and Sheila Covert and Derek Haber swing at the Frederick County Promenade Valentines dance at the Mount Pleasant Ruritan Club.

Staff photo by Bill Green

The Jitterbug. The Charleston. The Twist. The Jerk. The Hustle. The Moonwalk. The Macarena. The Cupid Shuffle. The Dougie. Twerking.

As musical tastes have changed so have the way we dance to them. But not all dance steps have faded into obscurity. In fact, three major forms of dancing: ballroom, line dancing and square dancing are still drawing participants in Frederick County.



Sharon Hume, owner and instructor of Sharon's School of Dance, hosts weekly line dances at the Frederick Moose Club on East Patrick Street.

Staff photo by Bill Green

Boot Scootin' Boogying

It might have been frigid temperatures outside on a blustery Thursday night in January, but it did not keep away the crowd of dancers at the Frederick Moose Family Center 371.

Sharon Hume, owner and instructor of Sharon's School of Dance, hosts the weekly dances. Hume said line dancing was popular in her native Scotland and across Europe, where she started teaching 20 years ago. When she came to the U.S. she was surprised she couldn't find a place to dance. Seven years ago she started teaching here.

By the time 1980's "Urban Cowboy" debuted on the big screen with John Travolta and Debra Winger, line dancing was already a phenomenon in country-western bars across the U.S.



Diane Vechry enjoys a line dance during Sharon's School of Dance's weekly line dance class at the Frederick Moose Club on East Patrick Street.

Staff photo by Bill Green

As the number of country bars dwindled in the '90s and hip-hop clubs started to move in their place, line dancing again made a comeback. For instance, The Electric Slide, a middle school staple in the mid-'80s, was actually a line dance. The Cha-Cha Slide was a favorite in clubs in the '90s, and was often played after "Cotton-Eyed Joe."

So when the music changed from song to song at the Moose Club that evening, the line-dancers easily transitioned their dance moves.

On a quiet night, Hume said she can see about 20 people, but on a busy night, there are usually about 60 grapevining away.



A group of line dancers participate recently in a weekly dance at the Frederick Moose Club on East Patrick Street.
Staff photo by Bill Green

Hume said line dancing is attractive because “it doesn’t require a partner.” So there’s no worry for the singletons who want to join the fun.

“All my people here, they come because they love to dance, but a lot of it is that it’s a dance family. So they love the social aspect of it, too,” she said.

And, she said, it’s a good workout and attracts all ages, from teens to seniors. Hume makes sure to keep the music up-to-date to keep the crowds coming.

“We have a good mixture of old school country to hip-hop,” she said.

She said she has a lot of teenagers, including her own, who attend.

“You’ve got to keep growing the next generation,” she said.

For those who don't know the steps, Hume said she teaches a class at 7:30 p.m. before the dance at 8.

Linda Plumber, 69, of New Midway was one of the dancers on a recent evening. She said she was looking to do something different when her son's girlfriend wanted to try it. Later, her youngest son joined her line dancing and danced with her for about 10 years.

For Plumber, line dancing was a confidence builder.

"I was very, very shy and didn't have that much confidence at all and it brought me out of my shell a little bit," she said.

Andrew Coblenz, 38, of Dargan, Maryland was also on the dance floor that evening. He said he started line dancing about 10 years ago and has been dancing at Hume's dances for about four years.

Coblenz said line dancing keeps your mind occupied with remembering all the steps.

"It lifts your spirits up," he said. "And it's good if you're having a bad day, you can look forward to line dancing and come here and, have all your cares go away for a little while."



A group of line dancers participate recently in a weekly dance at the Frederick Moose Club on East Patrick Street.

Staff photo by Bill Green



Dennis and Sheila Covert swing each other at the Frederick County Promenaders Valentines square dance at the Mount Pleasant Ruritan Club. Looking on is Dave Ludwig.

Square Dancing

Staff photo by Bill Green

Hip to be square

It's a January Friday night at the Mount Pleasant Ruritan Club in Walkersville and square dancers were starting to gather. They were dressed for the evening. Men sported bolos and women were dressed in skirts that fanned out with layers of crinoline underneath.

The Frederick County Promenaders host square dances the first and third Friday of every month, usually with a theme. The Friday night dances are for those who are more experienced and know the calls, which are a sequence of dance moves in square dancing told to the dancers by a caller. Anyone who wants to learn square dancing can attend classes. Students learn how to listen for the call and the moves that go with it.

Andrea Smith has been president of Frederick County Promenaders for nine years. However, she started dancing along with her parents as a teenager.

She compares square dancing to a game.

"Because you never know what the caller is going to tell you to do," she said.

And, she said, not only is it good physical exercise, but also keeps the mind sharp to listen for the calls and know exactly which way to turn. Plus, it's good for the soul.

"When you're dancing, you're just thinking about dancing," she said.

Dances for experienced square dancers are usually the first and third Friday of every month. Dues are \$40 a semester or \$80 a year. The year runs like a school year starting in September.



Sherry Downs and Alex Dommerick enjoy a dance at the The Frederick County Promenaders Valentines dance at the Mount Pleasant Ruritan Club.

Staff photo by Bill Green

The dancing is Western Square Dancing, Smith said, and before dancers are ready for the Friday night dances, Smith said they must attend classes to learn all the mainstream calls. She said it takes about 10 to 12 weeks. Those classes cost about \$10 per lesson. (See website for complete

schedule).

Natalie Evans, 25, of Frederick has been square dancing since she was a teen.

"I started with my grandmother in high school just so she had a traveling buddy, and I've been dancing ever since," she said.

Evans said she's loved square dancing not only because of the friendships she's made but where it has taken her.

"I've been able to travel across the United States with it going different places and dancing on vacation anywhere," she said.

Kathy Myers of Williamsport started taking lessons with her husband, Keith, in April, a few months after she retired. She originally wanted to take line-dancing classes, but found that the time didn't fit into her schedule, so she opted for square dancing.

"I love the fact that neither of us knew how to dance and they were taking the time to teach us a new type of dance," she said. "We're learning something new. We're meeting new people and we're learning a new vocabulary."



Deanna Molnar of Hagerstown and partner Anthony Schein of Winchester, Va. enjoy a dance at a recent Frederick Ballroom Dance Club dance.

Staff photo by Sam Yu

Strictly ballroom

Ballroom dancing was thought to be something that members of high society learned how to do for their debutante parties.

While it might be true that the type of dance is more sophisticated in its attire and rules compared to square dancing or line dancing, people are still clamoring to learn the dances for weddings, special dates or just a personal challenge.

The modern popularity of ballroom might be linked to films such as 1987's "Dirty Dancing" (Johnny taught Baby actual ballroom steps) and the Australian cult hit 1993's "Strictly Ballroom," as well as TV shows like "Dancing with the Stars."

Because of its pop-cultural influence, people have wanted to learn how to dance to steps like the cha-cha, the fox-trot, tango, rumba and waltz.

Frederick Ballroom Club offers ballroom dances at the Walkersville Town Hall. On a rainy February evening, the room started to swell with dancers as the 7:30 class started.

Chris Harrison, president of the club, said the group is part of USA World Dance, but the classes are open to anyone.

"I love the fact that people come here and have a good time," she said. "It's a very social club. Sometimes there won't be anybody on the floor and they'll be sitting at the tables talking."

Jody Schein, a certified dance instructor through Dance Vision International Dance Association, is hired by the club to lead the class through the dances.

She said the first three Fridays of every month she teaches an hour-long Very Basic Ballroom class for beginners, followed by an hour of open floor dancing. The Saturday dances are on the first, third and fifth of the month.

"A lot of the people who come to us are people who have ... always wanted to do it but don't want to commit until they're sure," she said.

Others come to the group because the dances and classes are pay-as-you-go, and don't require a commitment.

Husband and wife Mark Hanak and Martha O'Bryan of Myersville have been ballroom dancing for about 20 years, 15 of which they have been with the club.

"It's a really fun social ballroom dance club. Everybody's very friendly, and it's a good price," O'Bryan said.

Hanak said they love dancing the mambo the most "because it's the most fun to us."

His wife agreed. "It's fast and he knows a lot of nice dance steps," she said.

Newlyweds Chris Cason and Changhong Lindsey of Frederick found a ballroom dance after finding classes on a MeetUp app while they were still dating. They began taking classes in June 2018 and soon after they started, Cason popped the question.

They said they return because the other dancers are nice.

"It's good people, good company," Chris Cason said.

And, they said, it's a lot of fun.

"It's very good exercise," Lindsey said. "And the music makes you feel happy."

Her husband agreed. "Sometimes we laugh and smile a lot while we're dancing."

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If You Go

Line dancing

Hosted by Sharon's School of Dance

When: 7 to 10 p.m. Thursdays

Cost: Lessons are \$10; \$5 for children. Free to spectators.

Contact: Sharon's School of Dance on Facebook

Square dancing

Hosted by Frederick County Promenaders

When: 7:30 to 10 p.m. March 6; usually first and third Fridays of the month except for March

Where: Mount Pleasant Ruritan Club, 83 W. Frederick St., Walkersville

Cost: \$8 for guests

Contact: <https://www.frederickcountypromenaders.com/>

More: March's theme is Mad for Plaid; this class is for experienced square-dancers. Those who need to take lessons see website for dates.

Ballroom dancing

Hosted by Frederick Ballroom Club

When: Very Beginner Ballroom: 7:30 p.m. first three Fridays of the month; Saturday Lesson and Dance Party: 7 p.m. first, third and fifth Saturdays of each month;

Where: Walkersville Town Hall, 21 W. Frederick St., second floor, Walkersville

Cost: Very Beginner Ballroom: \$8 per person; Saturday dance,

What: Intermediate Tuesday Class: 7:45 p.m. weekly

Where: Dance Unlimited, 244 S. Jefferson St., Frederick

Cost: \$12 per person monthly rate or \$15 drop-in

Contact: <https://www.frederickballroomdanceclub.org/>