

Enjoy Dancing at Olivedale Retirement Village

Dancing is a wonderful way of keeping fit (without having to strain oneself). It also involves socialising and having fun. Residents of Olivedale are lucky to be able to do two types of dancing each week in the hall of their Service Centre. Dancing is on every Tuesday evening.

From 17h00 to 17h30 there is line dancing. Line dancing is quite energetic and it can take a while to learn the routines. However, once you have mastered it, it feels great to be dancing in sync with all the other dancers.

From 17h30 till 19h00 is ballroom dancing. This is the main event. However, the of lady ballroom dancers outnumber the men and so most of the men dance with each of the available ladies in turn. As spectators are welcome and they along with the ladies sitting out a dance enjoy socialising there is always a background buzz of chatter. In fact people bring their own drinks and snacks and Tuesdays turn into quite festive occasions.

What about people who are not confident in their dancing skills or who have not yet learnt to dance. It never too late to learn and help is at hand. A nearby retirement village called Summerfield Park holds regular dancing lessons every Friday night from 17h30 to 19h00 in their Plover Hall situated at 41 Carlton Street, Johannesburg North. The course fee is R20 per person per night and one does not have to pay if one is not available on any particular Friday. Fred , our instructor, will give newcomers some individual instruction, but he is very perceptive and he can advise those with more dancing experience where they are going wrong. Despite having to learn in a group class situation, it is wonderful value for money.

Fred was a South African dance champion in both the Latin American and Ballroom dancing styles and he has personally trained twelve South African champions in both disciplines. His aim is to make each pupil feel that dancing is as easy as walking. He starts by teaching you the hold. Gentleman this is a hold not a hug. In closed hold the man's chin is above his lady's right shoulder (so nobody will step on each other's toes). The man's right hand is stretched round to his partner's back and laid flat on her shoulder blade (so that he can lead her by using this hand like a paddle). His left hand gently holds his partners right hand at shoulder height with a slight bend in the arm. The right hold makes the lady feel confident that man will lead her in a way that makes her look good.

In Latin American dances, the hold is usually extended till the partners are about a foot apart. One may also adopt an open hold where the man cups both his partner's hands and holds them just below his waste. This way he can lead her wherever he wants her to be.

Fred makes our lessons fun by telling jokes, but he is also imparting nuggets of wisdom about how to dance well with poise posture and elegance. He expresses advice informally and here are a few of his quotes:

"As you open out into a promenade, you must not look like an octopus falling out of a tree. You must extend your free arm into a line that finishes at your fingertips."

"Dancing is just like walking, moving from foot to foot, but it is not militaristic – it is more of a saunter with slightly flexed knees."

"Ladies, you must be relaxed with a quiet confidence, so that as you follow the man's lead as couple moving as one you realise you look great!"

Learning to dance is not an overnight revelation. It requires learning steps and practicing them. Each dance interprets the musicality of the tune which goes hand in glove with the footwork. The elegance of dancing comes from the way you transfer your weight from foot to foot within the dance. It is hard to explain to those who have not experienced the joy of dancing. It's not only exercise, but a lot of fun. The few men who do come to Olivedale's dancing on Tuesdays are generally very good dancers and they will adjust their leadership to their partner's capabilities. They enjoy socialising and you will see the dancing crowd are the most active at any of the functions organised by Olivedale's Entertainment Committee.