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Shall We Dance? Lafayette's Afternoon Soirees are a Hit

By Cathy Dausman



They arrive, nicely dressed from Concord, Rossmoor and Walnut Creek, as well as Lamorinda - the men in hard soled shoes, dress slacks and collared shirts, the women in heels, dresses or skirts. For more than two hours they socialize and practice ballroom dancing skills at the Lafayette Community Center Tea Dance.

The program is 28 years old, says Lafayette Parks, Trails and Recreation Director Jennifer Russell and is pretty much the same as it has been except now it is hosted by professional dance professionals Karen Lile and Michael Arntz. The pair have taught at the Tea Dance since 2008; they appear thanks to a grant from the nonprofit Building Bridges.

The Tea Dances at the Lafayette Community Center are a blast from the past. Photo Karen Lile

Elroy Holtmann explains. He says attendance is lighter in May and October because many senior citizens vacation then.

Kim and Steve Wheeler of Lafayette have learned the basic swing moves and remember their daughter attending Cotillion as a Stanley Middle School student 20 years ago. The couple says they can now recognize the moves they've been taught in old Fred Astaire movies. They appreciate the art that goes into traditional dancing and enjoy it for the exercise and the way it keeps the brain sharp.

"You look pretty jazzy," Steve Wheeler tells his wife.

Madeline Brehme of Lafayette loves to tango, but she'll dance the other dances too. "I am old fashioned," Brehme says. Her parents - an English mother and German father - met on the dance floor. Brehme and her three siblings learned to dance when they were young.

"When I hear the music, I dance!" she says. She means it too - Lile says Brehme has been a regular at Tea Dance for 28 years.

Gail and Bryan Fong of Walnut Creek originally took dance lessons 12 years ago from Lile and Arntz. Lile says their 20- to 30-minute class lessons are "designed to give a little bit of spice to the party."

The focus is on one dance style each month, and each lesson builds on the previous week's work.

Holtmann brushes aside the inevitable hesitation from anyone having two left feet, by saying, "We're a friendly group.

"We all started out as (dance) beginners," Lile says.

The Lafayette Community Center, 500 St. Mary's Road, hosts the Lamorinda Tea Dance year-round in its Live Oak room. The class runs from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Wednesdays. A professional dance team provides a live DJ service and weekly dance lessons. Classes are \$10 for non-members and free with a \$15 annual membership. For details, call (925) 284-5050.

Reach the reporter at: cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com

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