

Get into the swing

Partner swapping was never so much fun as with the Lesbian Dance Club of Eugene

BY SUSAN DETROY

I just wanted more partners. Dance partners, that is.

Ever since I was a kid I danced it all, from ballet to cha-cha. Lately I've been learning more partner dances and longed for more lesbian dance partners. I complained to friends. I knew how addicted I was and how much fun it would be if more Eugene lesbians were out dancing at clubs, socials and events.

Finally last year I stopped complaining, rallied support, found a location and recruited a teacher for the Lesbian Dance Club of Eugene. And if you're smart you'll head to Eugene from Portland or anywhere else in Oregon for our community dance June 7, a culmination of our third 10-week class session.

So far we've learned the East Coast single and triple count swing, waltz, cha-cha, Argentine tango, fox trot, Latin hustle, foxy and, one of the group's favorites, rumba.

Dancing opportunities for lesbians in Eugene have been sporadic.

About eight years ago, after experiencing similar feelings to mine, Harriet Rubin organized women-only ballroom and Latin dance lessons. After a couple of years she found it too much work to organize on her own. Then the Rock 'n' Rodeo offered a Sunday queer dance night primarily focusing on two-step country with a bit of swing.

I learned from this history to eliminate pay at the door and to find others to share in organizing. But the best move was hiring Laura Taylor—a proficient, joyful instructor whose enthusiasm for dancing permeates the lessons.

Held at the Eugene School of Ballet, the classes draw about 25 participants. Experienced dancers create a friendly environment as designated greeters, sharing in a preclass review. Lessons are geared to who signs up, from beginning through intermediate and occasionally advanced. Both single and partnered lesbians are encouraged to participate.

Laura Stockford, who only started dancing last fall, expresses her excitement about how dancing has increased her activity level. "I am passionate about dancing now. I would never give it up. Since the first class this has been good for me."

Stockford felt so much excitement and enthusiasm, she joined the organizing team. "It's a social situation where I can meet other lesbians interested in being active in their lifestyle and making healthy choices. I never laugh more in my week than I do in dance class.... I get to laugh and enjoy so much what I am doing."



PHOTO BY SUSAN DETROY

You name it, they can dance it. The Lesbian Dance Club of Eugene will celebrate swing and nightclub two-step June 7 at Hilyard Community Center

No doubt, though, joining the class as a single lesbian can be frightening. But, Stockford says, "Once I participated and experienced the rotation of partners, the awkwardness about being single disappeared."

Laura Fischrup and her partner, Maureen McCauley, also started last fall without previous dance experience. "We can learn together and continue to learn together," Fischrup says. "It is a fun thing that we can do with each other and plan on once a week or more."

As a couple they were initially skeptical about switching partners, but with the encouragement of the instructor "we actually came to appreciate changing partners was a way to become better dancers," Fischrup exclaims. "And we meet other people in the class. We are both really enjoying it."

The community dance includes mini lessons in swing and nightclub two-step. Organizer Sydney Kinnaman explains: "We want everyone who comes to feel there is music for them to dance with. We plan to play everything from Aretha for rocking out to disco to waltz." ■

The LESBIAN DANCE CLUB OF EUGENE community dance is 8 to 10 p.m. June 7 at Hilyard Community Center, 2580 Hilyard St. Admission is \$5 at the door. For more information call 541-485-9687 or e-mail suselynd@yahoo.com.

SUSAN DETROY is a writer and artist in Eugene. Visit her at www.efn.org/~dets.

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