



LYDIA ELY/THE ASTORIAN

Attendees practice dancing during a belly dance basics class at the Astoria Arts and Movement Center.

Continued from Page 6

ready to get back to dancing and physical activity, and all of the benefits that come with that," she said.

Some fitness classes are back in session in Astoria, providing community and exercise while following state guidelines for social distancing.

Oregon Health Authority guidelines require anyone working out at a gym or fitness center to wear a mask. There is an exception for competitive sports, which do not include fitness classes.

Indoor classes are required to limit occupancy to ensure 6 feet of distance between students. The dance class had a dozen students in the large ballroom with room to spare.

Erika Olsen has been coming to the movement center since 2005, and was previously a dance instructor there.

She said she missed dancing with others, but got by with virtual sessions and classes at home.

"It was painful to not (dance), but it was a good year we put in," Olsen said. "We're all here and willing to wear masks."

During the class, West wandered from dancer to dancer, giving individual feedback. At one point, she reminded everyone to relax and all shoulders dropped at once.

Some fitness centers haven't resumed classes yet.

The Astoria Parks and Recreation Department stopped its indoor fitness classes after the pandemic caused staffing issues and low attendance.

Peter von Payens, the department's recreation coordinator, awaits participant's return. The department is planning on resuming classes in early 2022.

"I hate it, to be quite honest. I love

"Not teaching for over a year was definitely one of the most difficult things about the pandemic. It just broke my heart. It's just really wonderful to be back in class and dancing with people again." — Jessamyn Grace West, dance instructor and executive director of the Astoria Arts and Movement Center

teaching classes, I really really do, and whether in-person or on Zoom, it's a good time," he said.

He said there has been community interest in Zoom classes, which they are considering holding.

West, too, missed in-person classes during the pandemic.

"Not teaching for over a year was definitely one of the most difficult things about the pandemic," she said. "It just broke my heart. It's just really wonderful to be back in class and dancing with people again."

West said some of her new students work in health care and as teachers. The dance classes have become a form of self-care.

Jessica Spencer is new to the area. A fitness instructor and part-time respiratory therapist, it was her first time attending a dance class at the center. She said she's getting used to the weather, and was glad the dance class was inside.

The rain pelted the windows of the ballroom was audible in the moments between songs.

For Spencer, exercise is a release.

"You gotta start moving to keep moving," Spencer said. "It's nice to do something without using your brain. During the pandemic it's been hard."

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