

Dancer finds satisfaction in teaching others, even lost causes

April Dyntaxa offers dance classes Nov. 6 and 20 in Hermiston

ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — During the pandemic, when dance opportunities can be few and far between, April Dyntaxa is helping people learn to dance.

The Adams resident and dance instructor said she wants people to be ready for when there are more chances — more weddings, more parties and so on.

Dyntaxa is teaching two classes for the Hermiston Parks and Recreation Department at The Arc Building, 215 W. Orchard Ave., Hermiston. “Learn to Dance with April! East Coast Swing and Nightclub 2 Step,” is on Saturdays, Nov. 6 and 20, 10 a.m. to noon.

Her own history with dance came in her youth. When she was in the fifth grade, her grandmother pushed her dinner table to the side to make room for dancing. There, her uncle, who was three years older than she, taught her swing.

She said she liked the experience. A music lover, Dyntaxa responded naturally, but it took some time, she said, to understand what it was she was doing.

Dyntaxa, 74, did not begin training seriously in dance until 1991, when a friend invited her to a line

dancing class because he did not want to go alone. After one lesson, he did not want to go back. She, in contrast, did not want to leave.

Dyntaxa, then in her 40s, had finally “found her niche,” she said, adding the dance lessons and the feeling they created in her were “electric” and filled a void.

She practiced and she got better. And she learned she could keep getting better.

“It’s a path with no end,” she said of dancing.

No matter how good she got, or how great she becomes, there always is room for improvement. For years, she kept taking lessons from different instructors, attending workshops and attending seminars. In 1994, she moved to Pendleton, but would still drive to Portland to attend classes.

“I think you should take lessons from as many instructors as you can because each instructor has a different approach and specialty,” she said.

During her early years, her ambition was to be the best she could be and learn as much as she could. Also, she wanted to compete in a dance competition and perform publicly, she said.

She attained her competition goal at a Portland dance festival around 1996, as she competed in three line dances and took first in each. She followed that up with another competition soon after when she won got second in a line dance.

In the mid-90s, she started teach-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Dance instructor April Dyntaxa poses for a portrait Wednesday, Nov. 3, 2021, in the garden of her Adams home alongside a trophy from the Seaside Jack and Jill Dance Contest and a certificate from the Portland Dance Festival. Dyntaxa is teaching a dance class Nov. 6 and 20 in Hermiston.

ing a class at Crabby’s Underground & Saloon, Pendleton. This was her first teaching gig, giving hour-long lessons to students before the band started playing. She has since offered classes with groups, including the parks and recreation departments for Hermiston and Pendleton and the Pendleton Eagles Lodge. She also gives seminars and offers private and semi-private lessons.

Though she has won her own competitions, she said her greatest and most satisfying accomplishment is teaching. She loves it when she can sit back and watch couples, whom

she has taught, dance.

Confidence makes dancing fun, she said, and one gains confidence through practice. Expertise leads to relaxation, which leads to the proper dancer’s mindset she said. So even when a dancer makes a mistake, the mistake can be laughed off. One only needs to start again.

This is an analogy for life, she said. You get up and start again.

Dyntaxa speaks so much wisdom in her lessons, as with her analogy between life and dancing, people tell her she should be a marriage counselor.

A retired counseling secretary for Oregon Public Schools, she laughs off the idea of being a counselor. Her wish, rather, is to be a dance teacher, a job she is presently enjoying.

One of her favorite things about teaching is discovering people who think they cannot dance. Often, these people have even taken lessons elsewhere, but failed to gain any ability.

“I like lost causes,” Dyntaxa said.

Often, she said, she has been able to help such lost cases learn how to dance by first teaching them what to listen for in music. There are few people — maybe one or two in her years of teaching — who are fully tone deaf and unable to hear a melody, but nearly everyone else can learn to dance.

Dyntaxa has even taught a person in a wheelchair to dance, by choreographing a cha-cha.

Now well experienced in both dance and teaching, she said she is still working toward mastery. She knows several dances, though, including six count, east coast swing, nightclub two-step, west coast swing, salsa, rumba, Arizona two-step, country western two-step, line dancing, foxtrot, waltz, cha-cha and country couples pattern dancing, she said.

Though she knows many dances and has experience in each, Dyntaxa said she is excited to continue learning more. This is her passion, and she is happy to partake in it.

Hermiston employer, Puyallup employee enjoy remote work

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Despite living more than 200 miles away from her company’s office in Hermiston, Emily Cecil has the shortest imaginable commute.

Like 13.2% of employed persons in America, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, she teleworks. Cecil works from her home in Puyallup, Washington.

According to a 2020 paper for the National Bureau of Economic Research, written by Jonathan I. Dingel and Brent Neiman, 37% of jobs in this country can be done entirely from home.

Cecil said her work is “like any day in the office.” She is at her desk from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The only difference is her desk is in a room in her home, rather than in her company’s building.

She starts off every Monday with an all staff meeting via Zoom. Then, she stays in communication with her supervisors and coworkers through additional video conferences, phone calls, texts and emails. She does not feel as though she is missing anything by working in this way.

“I love it,” she said. “I really enjoy my job and working from home. It’s been good for me so far,” Cecil said.

She works for Swanson Insurance Group as an account manager. She goes to the company’s Hermis-

ton office once a month for a scheduled meeting and drops in on occasion on trips to see family in this area, but she does all her other work in her own house.

This was the only way she could work for Swanson, Cecil said. She had been living in Hermiston and working for the Business Resource Center when her husband took employment in Puyallup. Staying in Hermiston just was not an option, she said.

And yet, she could not find a job that interested her in Puyallup, she said.

Fortunately for her, she was familiar with Luke Swanson of Swanson Insurance, and she knew of a job availability. She and Swanson talked about it, and they determined it would be a good fit for her to work with the company in the way she is currently doing.

Part of the fun, she said, is retaining a connection to the Hermiston community. She credited her ability to work remotely with being motivated and enjoying what she is doing. This job is, she said, better than anything she has done, which is why she works well. She does not need someone in the room supervising her, she said.

An Eastern Oregon University graduate, Cecil also has recently passed her property and casualty licensing test, she said. After she completes her background check, she said she will seek other certifications.



Josh Burns/Contributed Photo

Emily Cecil works for Swanson Insurance Group in Hermiston, but she does that from her home in Puyallup, Washington. She is part of the 13.2% of U.S. employees who work remotely, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Swanson Insurance Group is an insurance agency, primarily dealing with commercial lines — businesses, farms and ranches. Josh Burns, one of two outward-facing agents with Swanson, is happy to have Cecil on board as one of four account managers.

Her primary responsibility will be personal lines, mostly for businesspeople who have commercial accounts with Swanson but want to keep home, auto and life accounts with the same agency.

Having employees work remotely is not new for the company, Burns said.

Pilot Rock voters back fire district tax option

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PILOT ROCK — The Pilot Rock Rural Fire Protection District received overwhelming support on election night, Tuesday, Nov. 2, to maintain services.

The district asked voters in and around Pilot Rock to approve a local option tax of 82 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. And voters answered, passing the tax 369-72.

Herschel Rostov, the district’s new chief, said the high numbers in favor were good to see and shows how much the community supports the fire department.

The district, according to a city of Pilot Rock website, “provides fire suppression, emergency medical services, fire prevention and rescue to the city of Pilot Rock and the surrounding area with a population of about 3,000.

The district two weeks ago became fully independent from the Umatilla County Fire District No. 1, according to a representative from the UCFD1. In July 2018, Pilot Rock Rural Fire merged with Umatilla County Fire District No. 1, which provided a fire

chief, fire marshal, training chief, emergency medical service chief and fire mechanic, the website states.

Rostov, 53, said he stepped into the role as the Pilot Rock Rural Fire Protection District chief Oct. 1.

“I just got started,” he said.

Rostov came from the fire department at Mercer Island, Washington, and before that the North Whatcom Fire and Rescue, a district in Bellingham, Washington.

“I came here really looking to provide a high level of experience, and especially for a rural community,” he said, because rural communities tend to be underserved in areas of training and more.

Rostov also said the district did not seek to raise the tax but keep it the same, recognizing the financial difficulties many have endured. Still, maintaining the level of funding means the district keeps its quick response team.

That’s a secondary service for the district, he said, but it’s vital to the community because it means Pilot Rock Rural Fire can send emergency medical service to the field and start providing life-saving support while Pendleton’s fuller ambulance service is en route.

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