

Dancers from page 1B

While line dancing, itself is a very old dance form, emerging from ancient tribal circle dances and the precursor of couples dancing, the Country Western line dancing rage has really come into its own within the past two to three years.

Doctors, lawyers, teachers, policemen, dentists, children, teens, senior citizens, folks from every walk of life and all ages are standing in line just to do it. What? Country Western line dancing of course, duh.

"It's good exercise. It's a great way to meet people, and you don't need a partner."

Those were just a few good reasons Gail McClure immediately listed why so many people enjoy line dancing. McClure is the Lace portion of the line dance teaching team of Denim and Lace. The Denim half is partner John McClellan. Both are Westland residents.

Initially, the pair started teaching couples a two step patterns but began teaching line dance about four years ago.

"The demand was just so great," explained McClure. "We had people keep asking us why we didn't teach line dancing." Once they did, the classes grew. They now employ other instructors as well and teach in schools and community centers. Downriver, in Novi, Pinckney, Brownstown Township, Howell and Livonia.

Judy DeLorenzo and her partner and fiancé, Gary Reno of Novi, make up the lace portion of the line dance teaching team. They also enlist the abilities of eight additional instructors who teach bar classes, private parties and at community centers.

Although Reno enjoys line dancing, he prefers to handle the business end of the organization while DeLorenzo obviously delights in donning the hat, boots, and other western garb, positioning her wireless headset and turning a crowd of eager city-slickers into a coordinated cowboy and cowgirl.

"The music that is country music today is kind of like soft rock 30 years ago," said Reno. DeLorenzo agreed. "It used to be, 'My wife left me. The dog died. The deal failed.' It was all down.

Now it's much more upbeat. The music itself has made a big difference in line dancing."

"It's really gratifying to watch people as they're stumbling and they're learning and 45 minutes later everybody's moving as one unit," said DeLorenzo. "It's just to sit back and watch them dance and to know that I've taught them that. It's really incredible!"

She's right! I took my place somewhere in the middle of the group of nearly 200, hoping to be relatively inconspicuous.

DeLorenzo began calling off the steps, demonstrating as she went slowly and only a few steps at a time. She walked among the crowd as she repeated the same sequence over and over. So far, so good.

Satisfied that we could accomplish that much, she added the next series of maneuvers with numerous repetitions. Then we had to put it all together. She continued on with the same method until the entire dance was completed.

Next, she added music. Starting with a slow tempo and still calling off the steps, I began to feel as though I made it through an off-Broadway audition, and was on my way to the final cuts.

The next song picked the pace up. DeLorenzo's reassuring voice kept us all in step. Then came the real test. The third song quickened the tempo even more and suddenly, DeLorenzo stopped telling us where our feet should be, which way we should slide. Now married to Joe, Plymouth VFW and other locations.

Low and behold, barring a few minor close encounters with those surrounding me I found myself facing the four walls at the proper time and having a ball doing the "Hillbilly Jitter." That 40-minute lesson was an aerobically dynamic as any session I experienced with my VCR version of Jane Fonda and a whole lot more fun.

"I don't think the people realize the exercise they will get," said DeLorenzo. "One of the things about line dancing is how good they feel — then it's apparent."

DeLorenzo dropped 27 pounds since starting line dancing a few years back. "And it's not because I stopped eating, believe me," she confessed.



JIM JACOBSON/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

In step: Dressed in their best country duds, Country Class dancers demonstrate the latest dance craze, country line dancing.

Country Class

Beverly Arsenault of Garden City, "Country Class" owner and instructor teaches classes through Wayne/Westland Continuing Education as well as the Plymouth Elks, Denim and Lace Center, Plymouth VFW and other locations.

One of the biggest advantages according to Arsenault is you don't have to have a partner. That's a real advantage for people who are newly single either from a bad relationship or the death of a spouse.

"All of sudden, they've been in a couple oriented situation for so many years, they don't know where to start," said Arsenault. "They have no self-esteem. It's like starting to learn to walk. All of your friends are married. All of a sudden you're alone — 'Where do I go? Where do I fit in? What do I do? I'm a fifth wheel.'"

Arsenault had been divorced about nine years when she went

to a lounge with friends and first saw country line dancing performed. She was intrigued.

"When I found out what this was and that you didn't need a partner I thought this is great!" she said. Now married to Joe, with whom she enjoys doing other types of western line dances and who also helps her teach classes, line dancing is still her passion.

Barbara Perrin of Westland is divorced and agrees with Arsenault. "The nice thing about the line dancing is you don't have to have a partner," she said. "I've met a lot of people and we go to a lot of dances all around the area."

Perrin takes classes from both DeLorenzo and Arsenault because "you learn different things." Another plus for Perrin is the opportunity to be someone other than a school teacher and a mother.

"It gives me a chance to put on boots and I have a hat," she said with a smile. "It gives you a chance to dress kind of funky."

DeLorenzo said line dancing brings families together. She knows families who plan to meet at a hall on certain day each week to dance together.

One of the big benefits of line dancing is all ages can do it," said McClure. Denim and Lace teaches a children's class through the Livonia School District.

Dancing for fun

Teens and preteens, too young for the adult scene, find line dancing to be a great outlet. Beth Gillis and Stephanie Myers, both 12, and both Northville residents, have been coming to the Wayne Community Center Lonestar Roundup lessons ever since they were offered.

"It gives you something to do that's fun," said Gillis. "You can't go out to a disco or anything."

Plymouth resident Pat Flannery, a single gentleman employed by Wayne County, started line dancing because he was just

"alighting around the apartment and doing nothing but going to work and going home."

He hasn't missed one of DeLorenzo's Tuesday classes since she started teaching them.

"It's a good way to learn," Flannery said. "You'll see some people who have been doing this for a long, long time. Other people started a few weeks ago. Nobody looks down at anybody. If you're having trouble with a step, more than likely the guy next to you is going to give you a hand. Nobody is going to take offense."

For Arsenault, "The biggest advantage of all this is when you have people come to you and tell you these things about how line dancing has changed their life."

How they had no self-esteem, no confidence, nothing. They felt like such failures. They started to get out. They started to make a social life for themselves. They started to be with people. They made a lot of friends — and it's changed everything for them."

Marquee from page 1B

to Livonia when we were in 10th grade. She graduated from Stevenson High School, and I graduated from Fordson High School in Dearborn in 1976, but we've kept in touch off and on ever since. If there are any other Lowrey or Fordson grads out there, call me to say hello, and find out how you can get involved in our new 'Let's Go!' section. Send me pictures of you and your family holding your hometown Observer in a scenic spot. Recommend restaurants you'd like to be featured; tell me if you've seen any good movies. We're working hard to make this your Observer newspaper.

Bob Dates recreation supervisor for Canton also called to say how much he likes the new section, and to let readers know about Country Music Day in the

Park, a fund-raiser for the Canton Community Planning Project, noon to 4 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 15 at Heritage park in Canton Township, (on Canton Center Road south of Cherry Hill). The event is being presented by the Canton Parks and Recreation Services. Admission is free, with a suggested donation of \$2 per person. There will be music provided by country music bands including Waco at 1 p.m., Sassy at 2:30 p.m. and the Canton Seniors Band at noon; food, a classic car show, and peddle boat rides. For more information, call (313) 297-5110.

Christmas will be here before you know it, and you'll be sorry then if you don't make reservations now for the 18th annual Christmas Madrigal Dinners 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Dec. 8-10 at the Schoolcraft

College Waterman Center. The cost is \$35 per person; tables seat eight. Call (313) 462-4417 for reservations.

The Madrigal Singers will enter the hall in full costume to present the Wassail and toast the Christmas season. Each course of this year's prime rib feast will be presented with trumpet fanfare and ceremony. Tickets go fast, don't miss this event which benefits student scholarships.

The Michigan Chefs de Cuisine Association is hosting a benefit Sunday, Sept. 25 in the atrium of the New Center One Building next to the Fisher Building in Detroit. The tasting, featuring talented metro Detroit chefs including Steven Allen of the Golden Mushroom and Kevin Brennan of the Orchard Lake Country Club, will take place 5:30-7:30 p.m. fol-

lowed by the play "Fiddler on the Roof" at the Fisher Theater.

Tickets are tax deductible at \$80 each for dinner and theater, or \$40 per person for dinner only. Proceeds from this event benefit culinary scholarships and the 1996 Michigan Culinary Team. Tickets are available at these local participating restaurants — Golden Mushroom, Acadia, Machus Restaurants, Palace Grill, Chimayo, Michigan Star Clipper Dinner Train, and Loon River or call 872-5110.

Kerly Wygonik is editor of the Taste and Let's Go! sections of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. She welcomes your calls and comments, 1-313-963-2106, fax 1-313-951-7279, or write: Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 86251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

Teachers from page 1B

"A few years ago, I'd get up on the dance floor to do a certain dance and in that area they'd have a different way of doing it," said Leach. "Now I see where you can go to different areas and it's more or less the same steps."

Finding a place to learn country/western line dancing may be as easy as contacting your local school district's continuing education office, city recreation office, church, or country/western lounge.

Some classes run for a number of weeks and are paid for in advance, while others run every week and are paid for at the door, like classes offered by Lonestar with NTA instructor Judy De-

Lorenzo at the Wayne Community Center. Those classes, currently offered on Tuesdays, will be offered on Thursdays as well.

Lonestar will also offer a monthly Country Jamboree at the Wayne Community Center beginning Friday, Sept. 16.

Classes tend to fill up fast. Beverly Arsenault, a member of NTA and CWLDA, has watched her Wednesday night classes offered through Wayne/Westland continuing education grow from 12 to 20 people up to the one class before Christmas that had 192 people in it.

Many metro Detroit country western lounges offer lessons on certain nights.

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