

In the swing



News-Journal/Gregg Pachkowski

Celine Tessier of Palm Coast dances with Randy Butler of Ormond Beach during 'Swing Night' at the Rockin' Ranch.

Dance craze unites young and old

By AUDREY PARENTE
Staff Writer

ORMOND BEACH — Swing dancing has bridged the generation gap at one local nightspot, where youngsters are mixing with oldsters in a dance craze that literally has folks flipping.

John Simmons, 60, is into the swing. He was dancing up a sweat one recent Tuesday night at Jimmy Ivanhoe's Famous Rockin' Ranch in Ormond Beach, among dozens of folks, from teen-agers to golden agers.

"About a year ago I met a lady who wanted me to be her partner at some free dance lessons. I started catching on and got kind of hooked on it," says Simmons, a clam farmer from Oak Hill.

He got so hooked that he set up a Web site about the places he dances, <http://www.castlewebs.com/swing>. Among the swing spots with free lessons, he lists: Tuesday nights at Rockin' Ranch; Thursday nights at River Deck Lounge, South Daytona; Friday nights at 600 North Lounge, Daytona Beach; and

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In swing dancing circles, the clothes really do make the man ... or the woman, 5C

Saturday night at Billy Bob's Roadhouse, South Daytona.

"There's some attraction about it — the holding on, the moving and the eyeball-to-eyeball contact. It's about laughing and smiling and feeling good. It's just active and fun," Simmons says.

Age is no barrier for swing dancers, he says. One night he danced with an 8-year-old.

"Her parents are swing dancers, and she was just moping around, and I asked if she wanted to learn to dance, and darned, she's very good. There's an aerial I can do with her. I pull her through my legs into an arc into the air and she comes down on her feet. It's really spectacular," says Simmons.

He adds he never danced before he learned to swing.

One of the benefits, he says, is good health. He's lost weight and gained stamina.

"I weighed about 300 pounds when I started, but I am down to under 180 now," he says. "I can do three or four dances in a row. Some nights I dance with a half dozen ladies and one night there might be just one partner."

Ken Tripp, 66, of Daytona Beach, is another "senior citizen" who has latched onto swing dancing with a new passion for life. He was divorced last year and was taking line-dance lessons at the Port Orange Senior Center. On the way home one evening he stopped by one of the dance bars and discovered swing.

"I liked it so much I quit the line dancing. I was so enthused about music when I was younger, but after marriage and children, my trumpet got put aside. Swing dancing makes me feel great, and I am smiling all the time," Tripp says.

SEE SWING/ 5C



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Denny Hughes, of Holly Hill, shows off with a fancy move while dancing with Sidney Shannon, of Kentucky, Tuesday during Swing Night at the Rockin' Ranch in Ormond Beach. Shannon is in the Daytona Beach area for the summer working in the Seaside Music Theater costume shop.

□ Swing

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Bandy Butler of Ormond Beach, who will only admit to being older than 38, said he owned a rock 'n' roll music store in Washington state. But it burned down years ago, so he went into selling beees instead. He thought music was out of his life.

"I started going to the Bank & Blues Club 10 months ago. They had a swing band and swing lessons. I thought it was stupid, but then it was fun," says Butler, who now has bought clothes and two-tone shoes in the style popular during the 1940s. Dressing the part is part of the trend, he says.

Kara Munsey, 18, of Ormond Beach, also dresses the part, with garters beneath her seersucker checkered dress and a page-boy hairstyle. She also says swing dancing is a great physical activity.

The 1998 Atlantic High School graduate was a cheerleader and is now coaching cheerleading, while also working at Flight Safety International at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. She plans to enroll as a student there in the fall.

"Partner dancing is just good, clean fun. You really can't drink and dance because you would fall over, and it's tremendous

exercise. When I started, I lost 15 pounds in the first couple of weeks," she says.

Munsey describes her favorite dance move as "the floor sweep," where the girl leans down to the ground and "the guy spins her on her hip, then pulls her up."

While all that sounds pretty complicated, Robert Steier, 24, of Daytona Beach, says swing dancing isn't difficult at all.

"I never could dance before. I never had any rhythm," says the recent Embry-Riddle graduate. He got interested in learning the moves when a friend invited him to the free lessons at 600 North.

Steier says free lessons aren't the only benefit. Most of the swing dance spots don't charge admission, and the drink of choice for most of the dancers is water.

Janet Ivanhoe, owner of Rockin' Ranch, doesn't seem to mind. She says anything that attracts people to her establishment will eventually bring success, despite the lack of heavy drinkers.

"Swing night keeps growing and getting better all the time. People used to say about bellies' night, 'How can you give out liquor for free, and survive?' But it's packed because all the guys come. Eventually it works out, and I do well," Ivanhoe says.

Bob Rysk, 38, vice president of account services at Benedict Advertising of Daytona Beach, was one of the Tuesday night danc-

ers at Ivanhoe's place. He says he's been dancing for four months.

"It's a great way to get out and meet people in a low-pressure environment. I was up in Chicago recently, and there were three or four clubs up there, and it amazes me how much this craze is catching on. Swing is quite a phenomenon," Rysk says.

The dancers who were giving free lessons at the Tuesday night hot spot included two couples: Steve Costello and Kelly Castrogiovanni, and Heather Fuller and Bill Lewandowski. They are among a group of about 20 practiced dancers who call themselves "The Swing Cats." Most of the Swing Cats are in the 20-something age bracket, and dancing is an obsession for all of them. They dance at all the local clubs and also head over to Orlando spots when they can't find anything doing in town. They are trying to persuade area clubs to have more live music, too.

Lewandowski, a computer programmer at Flight Safety International on the Embry-Riddle campus, says he was at a club in Atlanta two years ago where he first encountered swing dancing. When he came to Daytona Beach, at first he found nothing going on, he says. But then he discovered a small local swing scene that keeps growing.

Lewandowski's description of swing dancing "It's addictive."