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Column

Surrey retreat offers a sort of beach party/camp with dancing



ArtsScene

Melanie Minty

Dale Adamson began to learn folk dancing not necessarily for the joy of dancing. She wanted to find a program that could help her son mentally and physically. Now she is a passionate advocate of recreational folk dancing, and is the leader of the **Surrey International Folk Dancing Society**.

Folk dancing not only preserves and promotes ethnic cultures, but it is a fun way to exercise in a social and recreational environment. SIFD has grown from a very small group, but even with a larger membership and attendees at the weekly dance time, it still remains a charmingly welcome venue for anyone who wants a healthy and rewarding exercise program.

The thing is, this is more than just your weekly neighborhood get-together. The dances and music originate from traditional community gatherings in countries around the world. So far, the dance list represents Iceland, Ireland, Romania, Scotland, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Sweden and Japan, to name just a few. The dances have names like "Above the Rainbow" (U.S., Ireland), "A Ring of Friendship" (England), "Breton Waltz" (France) and "Dance of Ikaria" (Greece). So you learn about the rest of the world and different cultures while "working out." Top that, all you people in spin classes.

Need more incentive to join in with the International Folk Dancers? Yes, well, men. Men seem to hold back in joining a dance group. No one starts out perfect, and if you can walk, you can learn to dance. Honest. And here is the real kicker: dancing has shown to be the best activity for seniors to counteract the decline in



Members of Surrey International Folk Dancing at a PROBUS event last January, in a photo posted to the group's Flickr page.

mental and physical fitness associated with aging.

SIFD has an amazing informative website packed with all this information. I spent hours pouring over links and videos. Of course much of it I already knew (and embrace), but here is just a snippet for those of you who want instant gratification without benefit of the internet: A new study, published in the open-access journal *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, shows that older people who routinely partake in physical exercise can reverse the signs of aging in the brain, and dancing has the most profound effect.

"Exercise has the beneficial effect of slowing down or even counteracting age-related decline in mental and physical capacity," says **Dr. Kathrin Rehfeld**, lead author of the study, done in Germany. "In this study, we show that two different types of physical exercise (dancing and endurance training) both increase the area of the brain that declines with age. In comparison, it was only dancing that led to noticeable behavioral changes in terms of improved balance."

So get off that elliptical or treadmill. Let's dance! Beginners are always welcome at SFID, and no partner or

costume is required. Get challenged, improve memory and balance, meet interesting new people and, most of all, get out of your comfort zone.

In addition to the weekly dance times (Thursday evenings), Surrey International Folk Dancers have hosted a weekend retreat. Good news. There is still time to register for this weekend of workshops and more. The theme is Fall Fair, and it's on the weekend of Sept. 20-22 at **Camp Alexandra** in Crescent Beach, Surrey. So, it's really a beach party/camp with dancing. Thanks to support from the **Arts Council of Surrey** and the **City of Surrey cultural grants**, SFID can offer this rather wonderful camp at a very affordable price, which includes accommodation at Camp Alexandra, meals and dance workshops.

Check out the website surrey-folkdance.org for all the details and registration. This camp can only accommodate 57 attendees, and 38 are already registered. Let's dance. Learn something new.

Here is the final bit of convincing: Researchers found that dancing was associated with only a four-per-cent risk of developing a disability that affected daily activities, compared

to 13 per cent for non-dancers. Dancing requires balance, strength and endurance, as well as cognitive abilities like adaptability, concentration, artistry and memory for choreography. This news was published last March by HealthAfter50 & BerkleyWellness. And there you have it.

Of course, there is more to life than dancing (I say, with apologies to my dance teacher). There is theatre. **FVGSS, A Musical Theatre Society** has long provided amateurs with a venue for singing – and dancing. Music is the driving force, and dancing is always part of the performances. But really, what makes the shows visually appealing is the costuming. For months now, the dedicated members have sorted, organized and cleaned out 'stuff' to accommodate the new warehouse space. But, more room is needed! Here is your chance to acquire a great costume. FVGSS is having a giant **Costume and Fabric Sale** on Saturday, Aug. 31 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the warehouse: #2-12342 82A Ave., Surrey. And you just never know, there may be singing and dancing breaking out in the parking lot.

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