



Don and Trish Hardin rehearse dance moves along with others at the Mountain View Grange. The Hardins see dancing as a great hobby and way to stay fit.

Smooth Moves in White Salmon

Secret Salsa Society draws dancers of all ages and abilities

By Drew Myron

“Don’t think too much,” Lisa Hobbs tells the group of newbies learning to dance.

Over an inviting Latin beat, Lisa, a loan manager by day and dance instructor by night, is gentle with her eager students.

“It can be overwhelming at first: the instructions, the steps, the beat,” she says. “Just don’t overthink it!”

Welcome to the Secret Salsa Society, a lesson and social dance held every

Wednesday night at the Mountain View Grange in White Salmon.

What was once secret is now well-known. Sessions often draw more than 20 people of all ages and abilities.

From fluid dancers in their 20s to first-timers in their 70s, the weekly gatherings are low-pressure events focused on fun, with no experience or partner required.

The First Steps

The Secret Salsa Society was founded more than a decade

ago with a handful of dancers who regularly transformed a Bingen office space into an impromptu dance hall.

After a few years, attendance grew and the event was moved to the Mountain View Grange, where a hardwood floor and stage provide a more ideal setting.

Classes and dances are open to all. Participants meet every Wednesday and the second Friday of each month to learn, practice and improve their Latin dance moves.

Lessons are casual and offer the basics in salsa, cha-cha, merengue, cumbia, bachata and more.

The Wednesday sessions start at 7:30 p.m. with a half-hour lesson, followed by social dancing from 8 to 10 p.m. The cost is \$3 for the lesson and \$5 for the dance.

The second Fridays of each month are reserved for special events featuring professional guest dance instructors. Locations vary and the cost is typically \$10.



Above, the Secret Salsa Society offers dance lessons every Wednesday night. Lessons are casual and cover the basics in salsa, cha cha, merengue, cumbia, bachata and more. Right, no partner or experience required for the Secret Salsa Society's weekly lesson and dance.

A Community of Dancers

The weekly classes—and the entire organization—are run by volunteers. The activity brings people together, says Kara Morgan, who joined the group four years ago.

“It’s about community,” she says. “It’s not about one person. It’s a team effort.”

Longtime participants include Ruth Olin, Elizabeth English, and Jeanne and Eric Pelton.

Kara returned to the Gorge after 20 years away. Dealing with the physical pain of sciatica and the emotional pain of an ill mother, she found solace on the dance floor.

“Dancing was my therapy,” she says. “It filled a void and it brought me out of my shell.”

That sentiment is a refrain among the dancers.

“Sitting at home watching the same movie every night and not connecting with other people gets old,” says Parkdale resident Mike Reeves. “So two years ago,

I came here and learned to salsa.”

He says he was not nervous to learn the dances.

“Most of the people here didn’t know how to dance,” Mike says.

Moments after his arrival, he greets friends and sweeps a partner across the floor.

For Don and Trish Hardin, who live in White Salmon and have been married 29 years, dancing is a new hobby and a way to keep fit.

“I think it’s great exercise,” Don says. “It’s fun, with nice people, and it keeps us in shape so we can go hiking.”

As they move through the lesson, they work in new steps and muddle through some turns.

The steps take time to learn for some, but each dancer has an opinion on the difficulty of learning the steps.

“Depends who you ask,” says Don.

“Depends on the dancer,” jokes Trish. “I’m still learning.”

For nearly every person



Grange Hall Improvement Fund

Eric Pelton, a dedicated member of the Secret Salsa Society and the Mountain View Grange, died in April. His one great wish, according to those closest to him, was to renovate the place where he spent so much time dancing with friends.

The Mountain View Grange Hall is more than 100 years old, and in need of window and floor repairs. A memorial fund has been established to make improvements at the hall.

Donations can be made in Eric’s memory and sent to: Mt. View Grange No. 98, c/o Pat Sajdak, P.O. Box 718, White Salmon, WA 98672.

at the hall this particular evening—the sultry young woman, the awkward older man, the seasoned instructor—it seems that no matter what draws them to the dance floor, satisfaction brings them back. The sense of fun is contagious.

“We’re not really secret,”

admits Kara. “Just a place to have fun, dance and socialize. Once you get the dancing bug, you can’t stop.” ■

The Mountain View Grange is at 1805 Main Street. For more information, go to www.secretsalsasociety.weebly.com or visit www.facebook.com/secretssalsasociety.