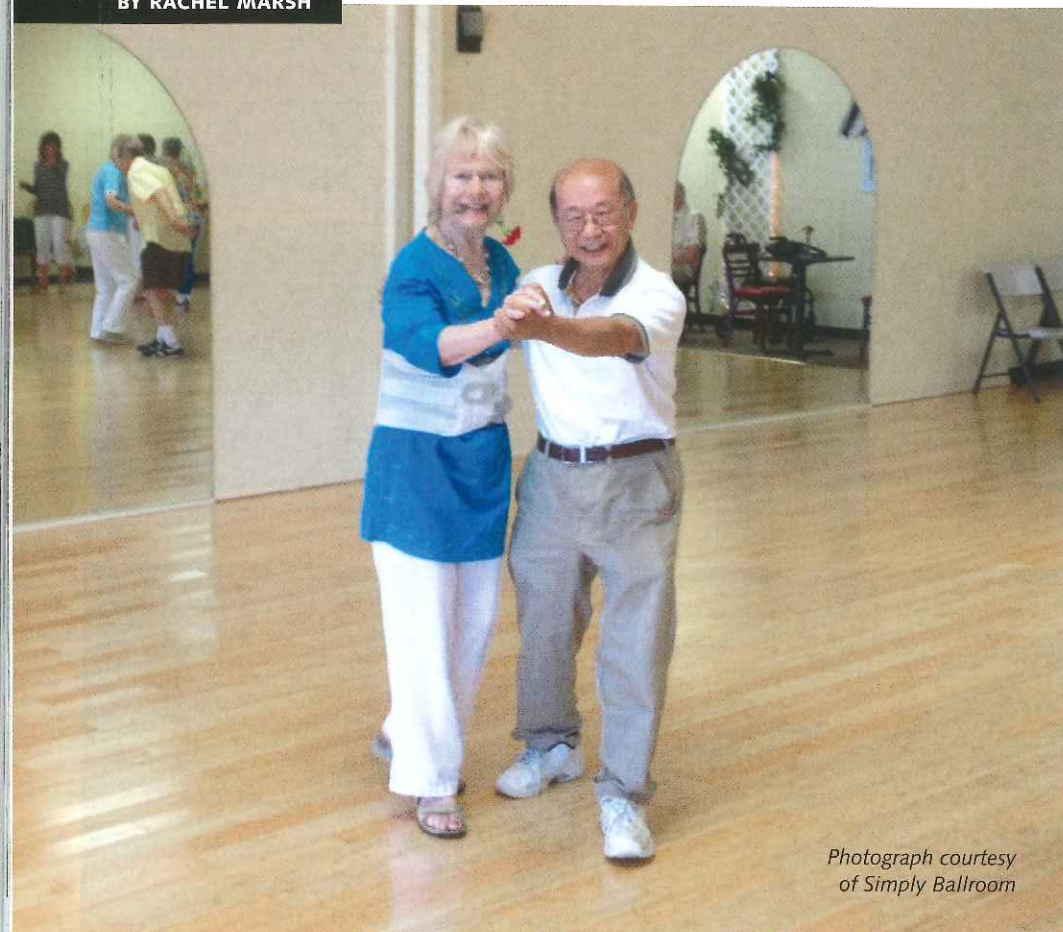


# DANCE THERAPY FOR PARKINSON'S PATIENTS

Music, movement and community

BY RACHEL MARSH



Photograph courtesy of Simply Ballroom

**D**ancing can be fun. It can be freeing. It can be silly. It can allow you to show off that frilly dress that you bought on a whim. But dancing can also be inspiring. It can heal. And it can even relieve symptoms of the physically debilitating neurodegenerative disorder, Parkinson's.

## PARKINSON'S DANCE THERAPY SAYS HELLO TO RICHMOND

Seven years ago, Veronica Nugent, Richmond local and daughter of a Parkinson's

patient, attended a Parkinson's Dance Therapy class in Texas with her father. Inspired by the program's quick and beneficial effects on him, she was eager to bring something similar back to Virginia.

Not long afterward, she acquired the necessary training and connected with a local Parkinson's support group. She and her husband, Lee (also a Parkinson's patient), own Simply Ballroom Dance Studio in Chesterfield County, which teaches ballroom, Latin, swing and line dance. The large space served as a perfect venue for

what became the Richmond Parkinson's Dance Project (Richmond-ParkinsonsDanceProject.com).

From there, as we love to say in historic Richmond, the rest is history.

## HOW DOES DANCE INFLUENCE PARKINSON'S PATIENTS?

Parkinson's Disease affects up to one million people in the United States. Patients' symptoms vary, and each case is unique. But there are many common ailments, such as slowness, tremors and muscle stiffness, most of which can be temporarily relieved through the smooth rhythms and deliberate movements of the dance therapy class.

Instructors encourage students to work within their own limitations during varieties of yoga, ballet and dance.

The class incorporates upbeat music as well. You know those times when you're listening to a catchy song like "The Twist," "Respect" or anything by the Bee Gees, and you suddenly realize that

you're subconsciously tapping along? Your pen is hitting the desk, your toes are tapping or your head is nodding just slightly?

Those who suffer from Parkinson's often find that listening to music also stimulates their muscles; they relax, mobilize and start "Staying Alive."

Victor Liu, a four-year student of the dance therapy class and a Parkinson's patient for 12 years, noted that he keeps an iPod with him at all times and hits play when his body starts to freeze up. He explains, "When I hear the music, it motivates me to move."



## KEEPING UP WITH A DIGITAL WORLD

Learning new tricks *By Paige Baxter*

In this day and age, Apple, Google, Microsoft and other tech companies are producing newer, smarter devices faster than we can keep up. Whether opting to try new technologies or updating current devices, we consistently have to learn new phones, software or operating systems.

Thankfully, we aren't on our own for that – many local resources are eager to lend a hand.

## ONE-ON-ONE GUIDANCE

Richmond-based **TechStar Tutors** pairs adults age 50 and up with tech-savvy individuals who offer assistance in using laptops, smart phones and tablets as well as any related platforms and software.

By learning to use today's communication technology, explains Techstar co-owner Tammy Glotz, older adults "can better connect with their family and friends, so that helps alleviate loneliness and it helps them stay independent."

Glotz adds that she believes her customers also want to stay in the loop with what's going on in their community and use their smart devices to track their health.

"It gives them a lot of skills to help them stay healthy," Glotz says.

Tutors meet clients at neutral locations either one-on-one or in a group setting. Contact TechStar at 804-442-7827 or TechStarTutors.com.

But any sort of regular movement is beneficial. For example, says Dr. Rachel Donaldson, doctor of osteopathic medicine at St. Mary's Neurology Clinic, "Research has shown that dance and yoga can be used as non-pharmacologic therapies to improve balance, aid in supporting good posture, improve muscle stiffness and alleviate pain."

## OTHER BENEFITS

Aside from physical advantages, the class offers companionship and connection to individuals who may otherwise remain homebound.

Dance therapy class students gush about their love for this community and

the benefits of being surrounded by people who empathize with their condition. Many referred to the group as their "Parkinson's disease family." Bill White, president of Richmond Parkinson's Dance Project, testifies, "The good thing about this [class] is the people ... Parkinson's is a community disease."

The class celebrates birthdays, signs get-well cards and welcomes new people with warm smiles, open arms and a nametag.

## PATIENTS ARE SPREADING THE LOVE

It began with a small clan, around 10 students per week. But after some free press, along with plenty of word of mouth, the

## CLASSROOM LESSONS

Facilities such as **Lifelong Learning Institute** offer many technology-focused classes. Learn the ins and outs of the iPhone, iPad and Android. Some classes also focus on exploring the internet or using software such as Microsoft PowerPoint and Windows 10. Check out their courses at [LLIChesterfield.org](http://LLIChesterfield.org) or call 804-378-2527.

County libraries and parks and recreation departments also offer occasional technology classes.

**Henrico County** libraries, for example, offer classes on using their collections of e-books, audiobooks, music and more, as well as a wide variety of computer classes: basic Microsoft Windows, Facebook, Twitter and software such as Excel and Adobe applications. Download the latest program guide at [Henrico.us/rec/](http://Henrico.us/rec/) or call 804-501-7275.

**Chesterfield County** also offers some classes for people to learn how to use social media platforms like Facebook, Microsoft applications and more. For these and other classes and events, go to [Chesterfield.gov/ProgramGuide/](http://Chesterfield.gov/ProgramGuide/) or call 804-748-1623.

**Pamunkey Regional Library** offers classes at branches in Hanover, King William and Goochland counties and other regional locations covering topics such as computer basics, Microsoft Word and e-readers. Information is available at [PamunkeyLibrary.org/classes.htm](http://PamunkeyLibrary.org/classes.htm). As classes fill, the library offers Reference on Demand sessions at [PamunkeyLibrary.org/rod.htm](http://PamunkeyLibrary.org/rod.htm). 804-365-6211.

class size has multiplied. The program at Simply Ballroom also recently won first place at UnitedHealthcare Community Care Award pitch contest, which came with a \$10,000 grant. Nugent is working to start another class in the West End in March, to allow access to a wider audience, increase outreach and build community all over Richmond.

Says White, "You can let Parkinson's run you into the ground ... or you can do something about it. Stay active. Get up and dance!" **B**

*Rachel Marsh is a local writer and born-and-bred Richmonder who infuses her articles with both insight and humor.*