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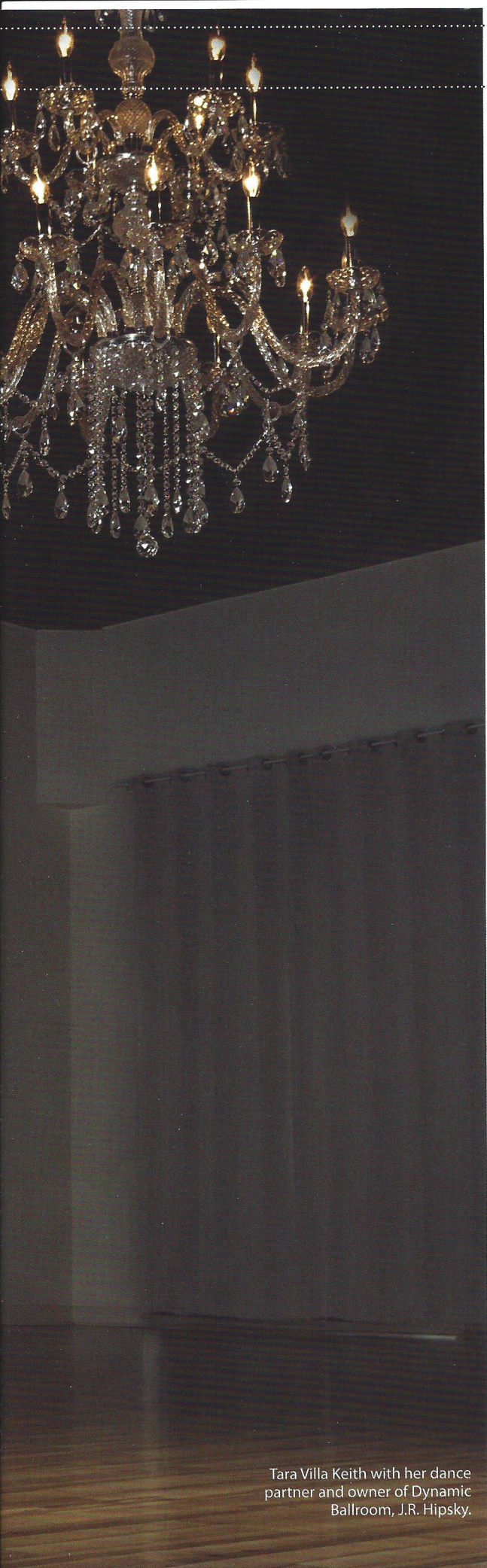
# Shall We Dance

Ballroom dance enthusiasts cite physicality, fitness, and fun as some of the many benefits of the popular pastime.

by MICHAEL J. SOLENDER • photos by ZAIRE KACZ







There's some pretty fancy footwork going on in Huntersville of late.

Tango, salsa, East Coast Swing, and various high-stepping routines are breaking out daily inside Dynamic Ballroom, a dance studio tucked inside the tidy Shops on Statesville shopping center.

The unlikely outpost of elegance and rhythm is situated in what once was a pole-dance fitness studio. And while plenty of cardio workout still happens here on the polished blond hardwoods, the dark shades are off the storefront windows and passersby are greeted with couples syncopating steps and promenading cheek to cheek.

"We've seen a steady increase in students since opening," says J.R. Hipsky, 38. Hipsky and his wife, Chistine, 37, are co-owners and certified dance instructors at Dynamic Ballroom. "People have found us mostly by word of mouth and by way of our monthly socials. People come by and enjoy a Friday or Saturday evening of fun and have the chance to dance to professionally D.J.'d music. We have beer and wine and offer a relaxed environment to try out some new steps and meet some new friends."

### 'Dancing with the Stars'

Ballroom dance is experiencing renewed popularity over the past several years, riding a wave of enthusiasm created by ABC's hit TV show "Dancing with the Stars." Now in its 21st season, "Dancing with the Stars" has a legion of fans across America that transcends age groups, appealing to multiple generations of followers.

The show even landed on the dance floor at Dynamic Ballroom in 2014.

"Season 19 featured NASCAR driver and owner Michael Waltrip and professional dancer Emma Slater," recalls Hipsky. "I received a call from the show's Hollywood producers requesting use of our studio

Tara Villa Keith with her dance partner and owner of Dynamic Ballroom, J.R. Hipsky,



for when Michael couldn't make it out to California. They ended up filming here for a couple of rehearsals because the couple progressed further than many people thought they would."

It's not only celebrities enjoying the benefits of ballroom dance, however.

Sarah Faulkner, 39, of Kannapolis was one of Dynamic Ballroom's first students, signing up for lessons after spying the studio while visiting a neighboring restaurant.

"I came in one day and J.R. was still painting the walls," says Faulkner, a registered nurse.

"I've enjoyed dance my entire life, from tap and ballet to line dancing, but had never done ballroom. I really wanted to give it a try. I've always loved the old movies with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and was attracted to the beauty of it all."

## Competitive Dance

Since working with Hipsky, Faulkner has gone on to dance competitively. In the North Carolina Classic she placed in the top three dancers in her first competition. Faulkner said she finds dancing offers her improved fitness, stamina, and energy.

She even danced during much of her recent pregnancy. "I love the fact that you don't have to be a size two to enjoy dance," she says.

Davidson College associate professor of music and orchestral director Tara Villa Keith, 37, is another competitive dance enthusiast who works and dances with Hipsky as her partner.

"I started out three years ago looking for a fun, athletic hobby that I could do year-round, regardless of the weather," says Keith, who met Hipsky when he was working for another studio. "Initially I envisioned embracing dance from a social aspect, though when I told J.R. I was interested in learning what was most difficult, he told me about competitive dance."

After one year of working with Hipsky, Keith entered her first competition and she says she is now completely "hooked" on the sport. She has subsequently participated in more than half a dozen competitions including those in Asheville, Greenville, S.C., and Charlotte.

"I'd never considered dance as a sport before, yet with competitive dance it's quite athletic and I feel a tremendous adrenaline rush afterward," says Keith. "I'm surprised to see dancers of every age and body type at these events. It really is a sport for everyone."

Those exploring dance find many options beyond competition dancing. Hipsky says he's often approached by wedding couples looking to perform a choreographed dance for their wedding. Singles looking to enjoy dancing at clubs are also regular students of his.

"Once people get over the initial fear factor, people realize how fun dance is, it is like a switch that flips," says Hipsky, noting young and old alike enjoy dancing. "There is a strong mind-body connection in dance. It's a great social activity and it is a lot of fun." **LNM**



