

Ballroom Dancing *for Fun and Fitness*

IT'S HARD TO DRIVE PAST The Center for Ballroom and Dance without looking in the windows, hoping to catch a glimpse of a couple engaged in a tango or samba. Located in the Deer Park Town Center, this full-service dance studio celebrates not only a one-year anniversary, but also huge success in its ever-growing popularity.

Ballroom dancing has been around for decades, but under the radar. It wasn't until 2005 when the pop culture television hit, "Dancing with the Stars" came out and gave it public attention on a much grander scale. And what people are discovering is that this full-body workout can be a lot more appealing than running on the treadmill.

"When you're dancing, you are moving your body in a way you normally wouldn't; there is not one muscle you aren't going to use on the dance floor," said Alyce Keaggy-Brinkmann, artistic director and co-owner of Center for Ballroom and Dance. Ballroom dancing often requires movements such as gliding backwards or jumping sideways, and these moves will help train muscle groups that may rarely receive a workout.

Your arm and shoulder muscles will benefit as well just by holding them up and keeping them in proper position. Strong core muscles in the abdominals and back are built. "The back is a great resting place for all those fat cells. In ballroom dancing, the back is dominant in maintaining posture and proper body alignment," Keaggy-Brinkmann said. As for all that beautiful twirling, this will improve your balance, flexibility and agility.

It's the combination and contrast of quick and slow movement that is so good for the muscles. A good example of this might be found in a Cuban motion. "If you can picture your body moving like a pepper grinder, you're toning and shaping your waist, hips, gluts, and hamstrings."

Many ballroom students experience a weight loss of about 10-20 pounds in the first six months of lessons, with a minimum of two lessons per week. "Depending on the intensity of the step,



PROFESSIONAL BALLROOM DANCERS ALISA ALYABYEVA AND ALEKS NASHEV STRUT THEIR STUFF AT THE CENTER FOR BALLROOM AND DANCE IN DEER PARK, ILLINOIS. AS BALLROOM INSTRUCTORS, THEY ALSO TEACH FITNESS CLASSES SUCH AS ZUMBA, STYLING AND BALLROOM WORKOUT AND LATIN FITNESS.

ballroom dancing can burn anywhere from 250 to 400 calories an hour – about the same as a brisk half hour walk on the treadmill," said Ken Richards, spokesman for USA Dance. "The more demanding dances like the salsa, samba and cha-cha can be compared to an intense session at the gym."

Many prominent medical research centers are highlighting the benefits of a regular program of ballroom dancing for those battling both Alzheimer's and dementia. With use of mental and physical repetition of patterns, the mind is exercised like the body is. Following complex dance steps, moving in time and keeping up with the rhythm of the music is believed to create mental health benefits.

For many couples looking to get in shape, the dance floor offers an exhilarating alternative to the drudgery of the gym. Your mind becomes distracted by the music, following the steps, and the energy you are creating with your partner. Endorphins are released into the body and at some point, you have forgotten that you're there for a work out.

The Center for Ballroom and Dance offers a wide variety of classes, including those specifically for fitness. Zumba, Belly Dancercise and Bollywood are a few favorites. For more information, visit www.ballroomanddance.com or call 847-438-4500 (for ballroom) or 847-438-5901 (for dance). U