

Dance away the doldrums

Local instructor offers free classes to unemployed

By Scott Gargan
CORRESPONDENT

Over the past year, with the U.S. economy in turmoil, dance instructor Erik Novoa wanted to do something to help friends and acquaintances in the dance community who had lost their jobs. Fully aware and appreciative of the physical and social benefits of dancing, Novoa wanted to make sure that clients without a stable source of income still had access to his services.

"I don't know anybody right now who hasn't lost their jobs," said Novoa, a Stamford resident and owner of Swing Shoes dance company, which operates in lower Fairfield County and New York City. "I wanted to make sure I took care of them."

To that end, Novoa began offering free dance classes to

the unemployed so they wouldn't have to endure the "double whammy of losing their job and their social environment."

Held at Dance Dimension in Norwalk, classes include hustle on Tuesday nights and West Coast swing on Thursday nights. Hustle, also known as Latin hustle or New York hustle, is a high-energy partner dance that evolved from disco. West Coast swing is a down-tempo version of swing that rose from the lindy.

The one-hour classes — which cost \$20 for the gainfully employed — are followed by a practice dance party with free food. Dance classes begin the first week of the month and include beginner's, intermediate and advanced levels. Singles do not need partners to join the class.

Novoa, a three-time U.S. Open finalist in West Coast swing, said dancing is a great way of dealing with the depression and isolation that can come with being out of work.

"Social and physical activity can help relieve stress," he said. "And it's important not to lose your friends, just because you've lost your job. By having social interaction, you can cope much better."

A dancer for the past 20 years, Novoa has background in ballet, jazz, tap and musical theater. Recently, he taught West coast swing to the Connecticut Ballet Company for their historical dance series and to more than 500 people at Midsummer Night Swing at Lincoln Center in New York City.

Novoa said he will offer the free classes for as long as the ranks of the unemployed



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Erik Novoa of Swing Shoes dance company gives lessons on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Dance Dimension, 3 Quincy St., Norwalk. New sessions begin Tuesday and classes are free to the unemployed. Above, students participate in a hustle class.

continue to swell. Ultimately, his goal is to keep the dance community growing, despite the tough economic times.

Erik Novoa of Swing

Shoes dance company offers free classes to the unemployed Tuesday and Thursday at Dance Dimension, 3 Quincy St., Norwalk. Call or visit Web site for schedule of

times. Contact Novoa at 917-414-3105 or visit www.swingshoes.net.

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