

GDLS-C Trainer Putting Skills to Use as Dance Instructor

Wins Honours at Competition in Nashville

By John M. Milner
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"Out of all the things I've learned, dancing is the best," Lou Gagnon, a trainer in Support Services, says. "It is a tool that you will use all the time." He says that people who know how to dance will have more fun at weddings, office parties, dances and bars.

Gagnon and his partner, Catherine Leslie, "have a real passion" for dancing, so much so that they have gone from recreational dancing to competitive dancing and instructing.

"We love dancing, or we wouldn't do it," Gagnon points out. A typical day sees him putting in an hour of exercise (either working with a treadmill or with weights) after work, and then having supper and going to the dance studio to eat and then dance until 9:00 or 10:00. He and Catherine get home around 11:00, just in time to go to bed. Weekends are spent driving to Toronto for lessons. "We're instructing, practicing or learning," he says.

Lou and Catherine have achieved no small amount of acclaim for their skills. In late December of last year, they traveled to Nashville for the World Championships of Country Western Dancing, which took place from December 31st, 2007 to January 6th, 2008.

Finishing 2nd overall in the Classic II Intermediate Diamond, Lou and Catherine placed first in Cha Cha, Two Step and West Coast Swing, 3rd in the Waltz and 4th in Night Club.

Performing at the Grand Ole Opry was "one of the greatest honours we've had," Lou says. "It was so amazing being in those dressing rooms with the pictures of all the greats."

Lou Gagnon was first introduced to dancing when his first wife decided that they should find something that they could both do together. She suggested taking dancing lessons and Lou found himself really enjoying it.

"At first it's a challenge, as it takes a lot of coordination, balance and timing," Gagnon explains, likening it to driving a vehicle. Dancing is "great for your mind (because) you're constantly thinking on the fly."

Even after the marriage ended, Gagnon decided he wanted to continue to dance, and began searching for another partner. He soon met Catherine and the two "hit it off amazingly." The two gelled so well as a team that their instructor suggested that they

enter a competition in Toronto.

Gagnon says that he enjoys the social aspect of competitive dancing the most. "You meet a lot of interesting people who are there for the same reason you are."

After one show in Toronto, they were asked if they would be interested in instructing. They've been doing it ever since.

Gagnon says that instructing is "very rewarding."

Gagnon was also an instructor in the military for eight years, instructing "everything from boot camp to battle school" including electronics, optics and the ADATS laser-guided missile system. He then spent some time teaching at Georgian College before coming to work at GDLS-C as an instructor.

"The rest is history," Gagnon acknowledges, "That was two years ago and I'm loving it."

Instructing dance is different than being an instructor at GDLS-C, Gagnon admits. Training at GDLS-C is "well-rehearsed", while there is "no master lesson plan, no PowerPoint" when it comes to instructing dance. Dance instructors have to be more spontaneous and "think on your feet, very quick," Gagnon explains.

Even as he instructs others in the art of dance, Gagnon continues to take lessons as well in order to make

himself a better instructor. Dance is constantly evolving, and there is always something new to learn.

When asked what his favourite style of dance is, Gagnon says it alternates between 2-Step and West Coast Swing. In addition, he notes "I'm really starting to like the Waltz." With any dance, the better you get and the more confident you get, the more you enjoy it.

Gagnon states that dancing is a great activity from a physical standpoint, as it helps to keep one active and build coordination.

"I've never met a woman yet who didn't say she liked to see a guy dance," Gagnon says. "Women like to see a man dance and vice versa. That's why those dance shows (on TV) are so popular."

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Lou Gagnon (pictured here with partner Catherine Leslie) says they both "have a real passion" for dancing. (Photo courtesy of Lou Gagnon)