



Richmond Parkinson's Dance Project Promotes Mobility, Creativity and Balance for those with PD

By Terri Woods, daughter of dancer, Jiggs Fowler

Sometimes people can get frustrated, discouraged and at times hopeless with everyday life. I've been there once or twice myself. But be encouraged. There are those out there who can definitely put a positive spin on life and circumstances if we are lucky enough to find them.



Veronica Braun with Jiggs Fowler

Fortunately there is that person, that organization, and that place in Chesterfield County. Veronica Braun, dance instructor and part owner of Simply Ballroom Dance Studio off of Hull Street Road, brings to those with Parkinson's Disease (PD) the opportunity to have some time to be just who they are with whatever level of movement they have and to DANCE. They are people who are there to have fun, laugh, meet friends and enjoy the music. There are no expectations individually or as a group, yet there isn't one I've seen there who didn't give it 110% effort in both categories.

This local pilot program began in January 2011 and has been successful since day one. Veronica displays amazing encouragement, leadership and a caring attitude in each class she leads. She also shares her knowledge of various music types and dances with different tempos and rhythms to the class, so it's easy to see why the program is such a success. This program brings together the mind, body movement and balance which are some of the major things that PD effects. Through the use of music, stretching, mobility exercises and dancing to slow and moderately fast tempos, it is used as therapy for the PD patient and it is just fun. As a caregiver, I watch my father who has PD go through movements and exercise that I never dreamed of only a few months ago. There are spouses, caregivers and family members that come and most participate in this as well. As I look at it, it's a win-win situation for everyone. The volunteers at the studio who work with Veronica on Richmond Parkinson's Dance Project are wonderful.

It's time.... participants in the class start to arrive, some have mobility challenges and other problems, but then they see their classmates, Veronica and the volunteers from the studio who help with the class and they are all ready for the class to begin. At first everyone sits in a chair in a big circle and they are all welcomed. Then (without music) Veronica starts demonstrating the first seated routine. As you look around the room you see each eye focused on her every move and her every word explaining each movement. There is explanation of posture for breathing, balance and the rhythm of the music that will be used for that particular routine. All are invited to join in and go through the routine (still no music). Once everyone has gone through it, the music starts and the whole atmosphere in the room changes and there is a different feel to the routine.



They're successful, they're doing what she's doing and they're having a great time. Everyone is participating. All are acknowledged for their success and it's on to the next routine. The auditory and visual means of learning works well. She continues to talk about similarities in music, dance and how they were developed through history.

continued on page 8



Richmond Parkinson's Dance Project Information

Where: Simply Ballroom Dance Studio, 3549 Courthouse Rd.,
Richmond, VA 23236

When: Wednesdays from 11 a.m. until noon

Cost: The class is free and open to the public. You do not have to have Parkinson's to participate. Caregivers, friends, and family are welcome.

RSVP: For more information or to reserve a spot in class, please contact Veronica Braun, (804)276-3343 or email dance@simplyballroomva.com.



Richmond Parkinson's Dance Project *continued from page 7*



After a few sitting routines and exercises, they stand behind the chairs and do more challenging exercises and dance routines to music. It is clear they are focusing on the music as well as the movement. Already most are displaying movement that is more fluid and they are more confident.

For the last part of the class, the chairs are moved to the side of the room and men are lined up on one side and the women on the other. Veronica introduces a dance and goes through each step. Some of the dances they have done are the rumba, tango, fox trot and swing. She demonstrates the movements and shows them how to count the rhythms (no music yet). The men

go first this time, learning each move by following her lead. As Veronica teaches them, her lighthearted and caring attitude makes each person want to be successful...and they are. Next she works with the women and the same attitude is evident. Now everyone gets a partner and she starts the music. They start counting and begin dancing.

WOW! They are dancing!

I watch as I see those who had a real mobility issue now doing the fox trot with a partner, no one is watching, they are just dancing and enjoying it. **The mind is exercising and so is the body. The two are working together once again. It is truly amazing!**



My heart goes out to those who are living with this disease, but I'm here to tell you that this program brings a type of therapy and exercise to those with PD that works both mind and body and has a positive impact on the heart and soul as well.

Veronica is so generous to give of her time and talent to this project. Veronica's inspiration and passion for working with those with PD is from her father who had Parkinson's for many years. He had a very aggressive version of the disease that included dementia, called MSA (Multiple System Atrophy). Veronica found out about the program when she found an article in a magazine about retired dancers and what they did when they retired from performing. One of the dancers featured in

the article was a ballet dancer who retired from the Houston Ballet. She was now teaching Dance for PD®. Veronica's parents live in Texas and her father's neurologist was in Houston. She contacted them and arranged a meeting with the neurologist and her parents and after the appointment they went to the class. At the time Veronica's father was in a wheelchair most of the time with limited movement, mostly shuffling. But by the end of the class, he was walking with big steps up and down the floor and swinging his arms in time to "New York New York". She said "It was amazing"!

Veronica spoke with the Social Worker and the instructor of the class and they told her about a training class for Dance for PD®. When she returned home, she contacted Lynn Klanchar RN, MS, PADRECC Southeast Associate Director of Education for McGuire VAMC and together they traveled to Brooklyn, NY for the training by the Mark Morris Dance Group and Brooklyn Parkinson Group. Veronica stated, "After we came back, Lynn arranged for me to do a demo of the class at a few of their events and she was instrumental in publicizing the class to the local PD community. If it weren't for her, we would not have a class". Since then, Veronica has attended another training course in Brooklyn and in the fall she will be going to Charlotte, NC with one of her teacher-trainees as well as other dance instructors for more Dance for PD® training.

For more information on Dance for PD® go to www.danceforpd.org.



Why Dance For Parkinson's?

- Dancing is joyful, especially to upbeat music
- Dancing is a social activity
- Dancing is excellent exercise.
- A dance class provides a complete workout.
- Dancing stretches, strengthens, and relaxes muscles.
- Dancing is first and foremost, a mental activity.
- Dancing involves the brain as well as the body to control movement. The brain gets a complete workout too.
- Dancing makes use of the senses. Conscious use of vision, hearing, and touch make moving easier for persons with PD, just as it does for dancers.