

Senior shares love of dance at Frederick retirement community

It wasn't until she reached her 60s when Shirley Bisselle quite literally waltzed into the world of dance.

"It was a fluke," Bisselle remembered with a laugh. "I had a neighbor whose husband had MS (multiple sclerosis). For her welfare, we wanted to get out and do something together."

Bisselle first looked into square dancing before signing up for ballroom lessons in Virginia. She later added country western dancing to her repertoire and successfully competed in dance contests in California, Texas and Pennsylvania.

Bisselle and her husband, Tony, are spreading their love of dance with other seniors by offering weekly ballroom lessons at Buckingham's Choice retirement community in Frederick, their residence for the last several years.

They teach foxtrot, waltz, swing and cha-cha to six seniors in the community - helping their students master the finer points of grace on the dance floor.

"I like to keep it up because it's fun to do and it's good exercise," said Bisselle, who counts the tango, East Coast Swing, West Coast Swing and lindy hop among her favorite dances. "It keeps your body toned."

Bisselle noted that some residents are dealing with broken hips and other ailments. She makes accommodations for those who have physical limitations.

"A lot of the people here have problems with turning," she said. "I take out the turns and things. We don't jeopardize them."

Bisselle wishes more people would take the class. Widows and widowers are reluctant to try it, she said.

"They don't want to come because they don't have a partner," she said. "It doesn't matter. It's a good way to get together. That's one reason why I wanted to start it."

Bisselle, 76, is convinced dance can help lift a person's spirit.

"If you have music and dance in your life, it gives you a sense of a peaceful feeling," she said. "It's a good feeling and a happy feeling."

For those who fear they might not be coordinated enough to dance, Biselle has some advice.

"If you can walk," she said, "you can dance."