

One, two, three, kick

Members of the Harbour Mall's Senior Citizen dance club may not be the Rockettes, but they probably have more fun as they learn line dances from Monty Souza, above, and his assistant Lee Terry, right. See story this page.

Journal Bulletin Photos by Lawrence S. Millard



The rocking chair crowd steps out

By JANET McMILLAN

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FALL RIVER — If Ponce de Leon were alive today he'd have to come to Fall River — not some Florida city — to find his fountain of youth. It's here at the Harbour Mall that senior citizens gather on Tuesdays to revive themselves by Hully Gullying their way to vigor and happiness.

For the last five weeks free dance lessons have been offered by the mall's Merchants' Association as part of its Senior Citizens Discount Club day. Some seniors, already there to buy goods at 10 percent off, stop into disco headquarters — a vacant store — for an hour of dancing and socializing.

Last Tuesday, about 175 people ignored the rain outside and concentrated on learning the Charleston, Delilah, Tighten Up and Hully Gully. Though the dance floor was only half filled that day, as many as 400 persons have been known to attend. More people, some of them young and looking envious, watched from outside.

Monty Souza of the New Bedford Ballroom Dance Studio, and his assistant,

Mrs. Lee Terry, had the dancers form lines to learn the Charleston.

"Okay, left foot forward," said Souza. Then glancing around, he instructed, "No, the other left foot."

After a few minutes of stumbles and unsure shuffling most people had picked up enough steps to improvise their own bouncy movements. And once started, they went on to learn the three other dances done frequently at parties here. Although vastly outnumbered, about 25 men were present. One of them, William Travers of New Bedford, said he attends the sessions because it's a good form of physical therapy for him. He also likes "lite dancing," he said, because partners aren't needed and no one gets left out.

Phyllis Mousseau of Fall River said she leaves her housework undone on Tuesdays so she and her husband, Ernest, can practice the Delilah. "At least when we go out there's one dance we can do," she said.

Even though Souza was the only person wearing platform shoes and no one wore

Dance

Continued from Page C-1

the almost obligatory disco costumes of glitter and outrageousness, the atmosphere was not one to suggest a geriatrics' dance-a-thon.

With participants' ages ranging from the early 60s to the 70s (and some in their 80s, it was rumored) the levels of agility varied, but everyone laughed at their mistakes and tried again.

One of the most popular dances taught last week was the Tighten Up because, as Souza explained, "when you go to a wedding there's a lot of rock music and you don't want to be a wallflower." Even the most bashful dancer, carefully trying each step over on the sidelines, watched his demonstration intently.

Roger Benoit, manager of the mall and originator of the Discount Club, stood watching the lesson. He beamed as a line of dancers backstepped by him. "It is wonderful to see the senior citizens here. This has become my best pet project," he said.

On one Tuesday a month, buses will be bringing people to the mall from Boston, Benoit said.

The dance break has proved so popular that the manager says, "I look forward to my Tuesdays more than the Christmas season."

While taking a short breather, an elderly woman dressed in slacks walked over to a friend who was still practicing. "We have to live until we die," she said. "We might as well dance." Then she took her place in line and began to do the Hully Gully.