

Healing Hands' 'Salsa for a Reason'



COLBY WARE/PHOTOS FOR THE BALTIMORE SUN

Joining the Healing Hands Foundation's party at the Engineers Club were: 1. Millie Rivera and Ernesto Rivera; 2. AJ Mangel, Rosanna Drake and Donna Avila; 3. John Hebb and Grace Badillo; 4. Matt Dean and Tisha St. Clair; 5. Glenn Roche and Niss Albaig; 6. Shelly Alt, Catherine Roberts and Kathy Perrotta; 7. Norma Rojas and David Rojas; 8. Adriana Pukalski and Patricia Deverka; and 9. Melba Leopardi, Jaime Flores and Venus Rivera.

BY SLOANE BROWN | SPECIAL TO THE BALTIMORE SUN

The Healing Hands Foundation added a little heat to a hot summer night with its "Salsa for a Reason," an evening of food, drink and salsa dancing lessons at the Engineers Club of Baltimore.

A few dozen folks assembled in the club's ballroom for Lesson No. 1 with teachers Grace Badillo, Dancing With Grace president, and Niss Albaig, Salsa Now co-founder.

"I think I did OK for the first time. Normally, I don't dance," said Dr. Ramzey Tursun, a Miami head-and-neck surgeon, as he and Patricia Deverka, Center for Medical Technology Policy senior research director, grabbed a bite.

"We did very well," said another first-timer, Adriana Pukalski, an attorney for the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.

"Better than expected," said her husband, Christopher Pukalski, Management Recruiters International account manager.

"I did really well, because I dance salsa already," said Norma Rojas, a registered nurse at Baltimore Washington Medical Center.

"Well, I always need a little practice," confessed her son, David Rojas, an engineer for the city of San Francisco.

Melba Leopardi, Vita Italia Wines liaison, Martina Adams, retired electrical technician, and Dr. Venus Rivera, a Miami orthopedic surgeon, took a little time off their tootsies and settled in around a table. However, another member of the group — Dr. Jaime Flores, president of the Healing Hands Foundation board and a Miami plastic surgeon — remained standing and stalwart.

"I love salsa. I'm a salsa king. My mom taught me how to salsa when I was 7. I salsa when I operate," Flores said.

This was also old hat for Millie Rivera, a retired cytotechnologist, and her husband, Dr. Ernesto Rivera, a Franklin Square Hospital Center obstetrician/gynecologist. They'd been salsa-ing since they met 45 years ago.

Kathy Perrotta, Broadneck High School math and

Spanish teacher, Shelly Alt, All Smiles Orthodontics orthodontic assistant, and Catherine Roberts, First Data computer programmer, were also grabbing a little "courage" at the bar before jumping into Lesson No. 2.

"I can't dance, but I can shake it," said Alt.

Donna Avila, volunteer teacher, had a different reason for not having participated in the first class.

"I didn't [take the class] because I didn't have a partner," she said, gesturing to her husband, Healing Hands executive director Marco Avila, who was taking tickets at the door. But she didn't fault his excuse.

"We just got back from Africa with 45 volunteers. We did four medical missions in one trip," he said. "Now we're raising money for our next mission in November in Guatemala."

That, and he'd promised his wife he'd be on the dance floor in time for Lesson No. 3.

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