Moab’s dancing ‘stars’ take the stage for annual MVMC fundraiser

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“Inspiring, beautiful, and fun” are words the Moab Valley Multicultural Center (MVMC) uses to describe the third annual “Dancing with the Moab Stars” event, a fundraiser set for Friday Sept. 23. The event, which traditionally sells out, features nine competing pairs of “Moab stars” and their dance instructors, showcasing a diverse array of dance styles, from the 1930s Foxtrot to modern Bollywood.

According to MVMC Volunteer Coordinator Katlyn Keane, the pairs spend upward of 50 hours “choreographing, practicing, and perfecting” their routines to “wow” the audience on performance night.

“I think the audience is always surprised at how amazing these routines turn out,” Keane said. “When you think of how small a town Moab is, you wouldn’t necessarily expect there to be this much dance talent, but I am consistently wowed by volunteer dance instructors and their partners and it’s just fun seeing the audience be as impressed as I am.”

In addition to choosing their own music and costumes, local instructors and their Moab stars have only three months to prepare a one to three minute dance routine.

As always, MVMC representatives say this year’s show features many different types of dance.

“Moab star” and Grand County High School Activities Director Ron Dolphin will perform a “Grease” inspired dance with dance instructor Cindy Montague.

“I’ve never danced, so this is really taking me outside of my box and given me courage to try something new,” said Dolphin in an MVMC-produced video.
Other “Moab stars” joke about being taken out of their comfort zone, like Grand County Council member Ken Ballantyne, who will perform a foxtrot with dance instructor Kathy Hazam.

“I’m learning what a foxtrot is,” joked Ballantyne during practice.

“He’s doing really well with that,” Hazam replied.

Other competitors this year include Moab City Council member Heila Ershadi, who will perform with instructor Jen Evers; Grand County Council member Mary McGann, dancing with Norma Banuelos; Mark Pryshlak, AmeriCorps VISTA at the Moab Free Health Clinic, performing with Karen Garthwait; Moab realtor Becky Byrd, who will dance with Bailey Hansen; Marian DeLay, former executive director of the Moab Area Travel Council, who will perform with Gretchen Wise; UPS driver Scott Dailey, who is dancing with Laura Hernandez; and City Market employee Mike McCurdy, performing with Kira Winthrow.

The dancers will be rated by three judges — local dance instructors Rita Maldonado and Sandi Snead, and last year’s “Dancing with the Stars” champion Gabriel Woytek, whose hip hop routine with Coyote Shuttle owner Kristi Jenson earned them the prize.

Although those judges decide the scores, MVMC representatives said audience members play a significant role in the “People’s Choice” award by choosing their favorite performance via applause and shouts captured on a sound meter.

In addition to the nine competing pairs, the show will feature several exposition dances, including a Scottish Highland fling dance and a swing routine, Keane said. The audience can look forward to an “amazing” flag processional to start the show, featuring Moab Taiko Dan and 22 community members representing theirs or their family’s home countries, she said.

“I think this is going to be a very unique way to open the show and something that Moab has never seen before,” Keane said. “It is a beautiful and powerful way to represent the diversity of this little valley.”

Keane said that the money raised from “Dancing with the Moab Stars” supports five focus areas at the MVMC — crisis resource and referral, interpretation and translation, language and life skills, youth education and outreach and cultural education and outreach.

“We have these fundraisers because unlike grants, which many times have funding that needs to be allotted to a specific program area, we can use this type of fundraising money for anything we need which is really important,” Keane said.

Keane thanked the community for supporting the Multicultural Center.
“Our mission is to build bridges across language and culture through family support, community collaboration and education and for many people we are an essential resource here in Moab,” Keane said.

“Dancing with the Moab Stars” starts at 7 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 23 at the Grand County High School Auditorium, 608 South 400 East. Doors open at 6:30 p.m.

Tickets are $13 in advance and $15 at the door. Advance tickets are available at the Moab Valley Multicultural Center, 156 North 100 West.

For more information contact the Moab Valley Multicultural Center at 435-259-5444.

ByBy Molly Marcello

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