

Q&A: Winsett keeps folks on the move

By Molly Linder on Wednesday, February 8, 2023



OLIVIA SHAPIRO/THE OGLETHORPE ECHO After teaching the steps to the line dance, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, instructor Debbie Winsett puts music behind the moves.

Debbie Winsett, who teaches line dancing at the Oglethorpe County Recreation Department and the American Legion, has been dancing for six years, but started teaching four years ago. Winsett spoke with The Oglethorpe Echo about her class and what she loves about teaching dance.

Watch Debbie Winsett teach a reporter how to line dance:



Comments edited for length and clarity.

Q: What is your favorite part about teaching line dancing?

A: I want to say my favorite part is, well, I love the people. I love everybody in our group, we've got in all my classes, great people. But when we're dancing, and you hear the stomping of the boots, that I absolutely love. The faster dances with the boot stomping, and you can hear the taps going across the floor. I love that.

Q: What's your favorite fast-paced dance?

A: I love Fishing in the Dark. However, I just taught a new one called Setting the Woods on Fire. It's 96 steps, which is kind of fast. That one's awesome, too. I can't hardly say I've really got a favorite because I love just about all of them.

Q: What's the participants' overall favorite?

A: Well, they range differently, because my Tuesday morning group, they're kind of beginners. My Legion class now, we get pretty feisty in there. As a matter of fact, I start off slow with warm ups. And then we go on, because it's two hours long. And as we go on by the last 30 minutes, I'm throwing those fast ones out there. A lot of stomping and a lot of turning and twirling and you see some slowly drop out, but that's OK, we've got several that are really good.

Q: Can you tell us just a little bit more about how the Legion class works?

A: At the Legion, it's on Wednesday nights from 6:30-8:30 p.m. I have to have at least five people that contact me and say they'd come, and so there actually will be six dancers. And that's just the number we picked out of a hat. I have up to 26 members. They'll text me and say "Yes, I'm coming" or "No, I'm not." And once I get five, I send out a group text. I tell everybody, we're having class, they have by 1 o'clock to notify me. I get in touch with the commander to let her know we're coming. I get in touch with the bartender, who opens and closes the doors there and locks up. I put it on Facebook, and then I have a handful that are not on group texts yet because they're new. So I will contact them individually. I'll hand out step sheets, so people can go home and practice. Then, I teach here at the Oglethorpe rec department on Tuesday mornings. It's from 9-10 a.m. It is \$5 a class. And then I've just started teaching some at the Oglethorpe Senior Center, and those are very, very beginner.

Q: How have those (senior center classes) been?

A: They've been awesome. A lot of the people there are my age and some older. They will get out there and attempt to dance. I've had some out there with walkers. I've had them out there with canes. They are so happy. They're so excited. We even have dances that they don't even have to get up for. We do the Macarena. They do it from their chairs. We're not doing the dance portion of it, we're just doing the hand motions. So if they're not able to

Q: How have those (senior center classes) been?

A: They've been awesome. A lot of the people there are my age and some older. They will get out there and attempt to dance. I've had some out there with walkers. I've had them out there with canes. They are so happy. They're so excited. We even have dances that they don't even have to get up for. We do the Macarena. They do it from their chairs. We're not doing the dance portion of it, we're just doing the hand motions. So if they're not able to get up, they can still participate by doing the hand motions to the Macarena. And today, we did the Hokey Pokey, and they can even do that from their chair.

Q: Do you see a boost in their mood and even their physical ability?

A: It's funny, because the first couple of times I went, they were a little bit shy to get up there. Now they're getting up there a little bit more and they're excited. You know, and then sometimes they're like, "Oh, I can't do that. I can't do that," and will be in the middle of a dance. And they're thinking, I can't do this and then they realize it's so simple. Next thing I know, we got them coming up on the floor one by one and have a full dance floor.

Q: What do you want to tell people about line dancing that they might not know?

A: My favorite attire is my Western wear and certainly my cowboy boots. If you come down here at the rec department, we're not allowed to wear boots here. So that's kind of important for people to know, because I'd hate for somebody to show up here and not be in the right attire. I just always say come to have a great time. It's not just fun. It's a lot of good fellowship. We've got great members. It's good exercise. I had a new person last night text me this morning. She said, "Y'all made me feel so welcome," and that's what we want to do. We want everybody to come and just have a good time.