

Zumba: The word means 'move fast and have fun,' and that's exactly what area exercise enthusiasts are doing

By Terry Morris
Staff Writer

ENGLEWOOD — It's just after 8 on a Saturday morning, and Miss Leslie's School of Dance is jammed with people who are keeping up with the Joneses.

Doug and Joan Jones are at the front of the mirrored studio, leading one of the dozen classes they teach every week in Zumba, a form of dance aerobics from south of the border that's found its Ohio hotbed north of Dayton.

Charismatic originator Alberto "Beto" Perez, who brought Zumba to Florida from his native Colombia in 1999, has described the Englewood couple's following as "the Ohio phenomenon."

The unassuming Joneses, who have taught Zumba in the Dayton area since 2003 and are poised to begin carrying their exercise gospel throughout the state, deflect credit for the popularity here to "Beto" and the hot Latin music and dance moves that are the heart of it.

Derived from a Colombian word meaning to move fast and have fun, Zumba incorporates footwork and body movements from the merengue, mambo, salsa, rumba, cumbia, reggaeton and calypso to a mix Latin songs. Arm movements and contractions add an isometric element, but require an ability to do two sometimes quite different things at once.

Equal parts dancing and aerobics, it burns between 500 and 700 calories per session.

Beginners who expect to do it all the first time may not succeed. Those who stick with it say it gets easier, is consistently enjoyable and gets them in shape. Classes attract exercisers of all ages and fitness levels. The vast majority are women.

The Joneses' Saturday class offered something for many. He set the pace, performing the moves and combinations at an advanced level. To his right and also with her back turned to the class, his wife did the same routines at an intermediate level.

Experienced class members stationed at the front of the room also gave beginners somewhere to look if they lost track, which was easy to do in a class that flowed almost without pause, included few verbal instructions and modulated from low to high intensity.

It soon became apparent that there's more than one way to do Zumba correctly. "Music like this (popular contemporary Latin songs, almost always sung in Spanish) brings out everyone's individual personality," Doug Jones, 35, said.

Joan Jones, 42, always tells newcomers to "get the feet first, then add the arms when you're ready. The former personal trainer is the mother of Zumba in Montgomery County.

She saw an infomercial in 2002, ordered the Zumba DVD (which has sold 2 million copies internationally) and started doing it in the living room. "I invited some friends over, who told some other friends and pretty soon it was ruining the carpet."

They moved to a room at the Klepz YMCA in Englewood and, after wondering where they "could find a Latin guy like Beto to lead us," enlisted her husband.

A body builder, martial-arts enthusiast and FedEx driver, "Doug has always been a great dancer, unlike me," she said. "I have two left feet. Before Zumba, I couldn't even do a grapevine step."

"I thought it would be easy, but it took me three years to get the salsa down the way Beto does it," said Doug, who sometimes perfects new workout routines in the back of his delivery truck on his lunch hour.

"The packages have been cleared out by then, which gives me room to move. But the truck starts shaking. One time, the police stopped to find out why. There I was with my shirt off. I didn't want to get my uniform sweaty," he said.

Their classes at the Englewood Y grew to take over half the gymnasium, the entire gymnasium and are now spreading throughout the area. Taught by instructors they have trained, Zumba is being offered at more than 30 area rec centers, YMCAs, private clubs, church basements, dance schools and corporate fitness centers.

The Joneses, who are among the first 14 to be named master instructors, are part of something that may show up on reality television soon.

TV producer Mark Burnett (*Survivor*, *The Apprentice*, *Rockstar*) and music producer Emilio Estefan recently invested in Zumba as major partners.

Petra Robinson, former vice president of the Aerobics and Fitness Association, has been hired to help crystallize the concept and carry it overseas.

"Zumba is poised for a breakout," she said from her office in San Diego. "The fitness industry is looking for something new, and people like Doug and Joan have proved it works," she said.

"Zumba is a lot less structured than other programs in the clubs like spinning, Pilates, Steps and Body Pump. It's not your typical cookie-cutter aerobics to boom, boom music. It's more like having a party."

Rose M. Harris of Huber Heights, who takes two to three classes a week, said Zumba with the Joneses has gotten her into shape and back in touch with her heritage.

"I was born in Mexico City, but left my culture behind to emulate being an American. This has brought that back through the music and the movement."

Jorge Erazo, an engineer from Englewood, teaches Zumba at the East End Community Center in Dayton, the Oakwood Community Center and Five Seasons Country Club in Mason.

"This is right up my alley," the native of Ecuador said. I've been dancing the salsa and merengue all my life. This is an opportunity to do it in a different way and mix it with exercise."

Fee for a Zumba class typically ranges from \$8 to \$10. The Joneses admit first-timers free at locations that are open to the public.

Wear a T-shirt and shorts or sweatpants. More advance exercisers sometimes wear official Zumba garb and sport Zumba tattoos. Bring water and a towel, because you will sweat.

More information about Zumba and classes offered in the Dayton area is available at the Web site www.zumbaohio.com; by e-mail at info@zumbaohio.com; or at (937) 689-7572.

Places to Zumba

(some require membership)

Miss Leslie's School of Dance, Englewood, (937) 832-2689.

Always Ballroom, Dayton, (937) 256-2626.

Five Seasons Country Club, Sugarcreek Twp., (937) 848-9200.

NCR Health and Fitness Center, (937) 689-7572.

Reynolds and Reynolds, (937) 485-0589.

East End Community Center, Dayton, (937) 259-1898.

Oakwood Community Center, (937) 298-0775.

Kira's Oasis, Centerville, (937) 620-1678.

Klepz YMCA, Englewood, (937) 836-9622.

Troy Recreation Center, (937) 339-5145.

Vandalia Recreation Center, (937) 415-2340.

Fairborn Intermediate School, (937) 572-8907 (instructor's phone).

Miamisburg Community Center, (937) 847-6471.

Sinclair Community College, (937) 231-5517 (instructor).

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, (937) 231-5517 (instructor).

Huber Heights YMCA, (937) 236-9622.

Premier Ladies Fitness, locations in Centerville, (937) 435-3555; Huber Heights, (937) 235-3160; and Kettering, (937) 293-6790.

Earl Heck Center, Englewood, (937) 836-5929.

Englewood Indoor Soccer, (937) 832-4625.

West Milton Church of the Brethren, (937) 698-4395.

Dance Expressions, Vandalia, (937) 890-9606.

Miami Valley Martial Arts Center, Trotwood, (937) 603-9708.

South YMCA, Kettering, (937) 434-1964.

Turning Pointe, Englewood, (937) 836-3594.

Second Path Yoga Studio, Miamisburg, (937) 384-0980.

Coffman YMCA, Springboro, (937) 886-9622.

Stephen Bell Elementary School, Bellbrook, (937) 848-7831.

Crossview Christian Church, Waynesville, (937) 885-7402.

The Earth's Center, Tipp City, (937) 520-0472.

Precious Blood School, Dayton, (937) 277-2291.

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