



## CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

### PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

**AGENDA DATE:** March 26, 2008

**TO:** Park and Recreation Commission

**FROM:** Recreation Division, Parks and Recreation Department

**SUBJECT:** Ballroom Dance Program

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Commission receive a presentation on changes to the Saturday Ballroom dances and ballroom dance lessons at the Carrillo Recreation Center.

#### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this report is to review changes made in November 2007 in an effort to sustain the Saturday Night ballroom dance program.

#### Background:

- Public dances have been an important part of Carrillo Recreation Center programs since its construction in 1914. Originally focused on youth, teenagers gathered in the Carrillo Ballroom for dances after high school sports games. By the 1950's, when many youth programs moved to the Cabrillo Pavilion, the dances changed to serve an adult population.
- Between 1950 and 1990, the Saturday Night Dances attracted a mixture of adults, including senior citizens. These dances generated a significant amount of revenue for the Carrillo Recreation Center which was part of the Department's commitment to the General Fund. In recent years, although these dances have been open to everyone, they have attracted primarily a senior citizen crowd. During 2000, an average of 100 dancers participated in the Saturday night program. By October 2007, that average was reduced to 44 dancers, demonstrating a slow but steady decline in participation.

#### Challenges:

- The dances were heavily subsidized by the Active Adults and Classes section due to declining participation. Dances that made over \$1,000 per month in 2000 were losing \$500 a month by mid-2007.
- A format requiring bands to play the exact same sequence from a large variety of dance formats limited the availability of performers. Many of the musicians with the ability to perform the old format were retiring and difficult to attract.

**Changes:**

- The Carrillo Recreation Center worked with Jonathan & Sylvia Swing Dance for over 20 years on weeknight lessons and swing dances two Fridays a month. While participation in the ballroom dance program declined, swing dances continued to thrive. Staff worked with Jonathan Bixby as an independent contractor to improve the attendance in the ballroom program.
- Prior to November 2007, the dances had been offered from 8:00 -11:00 pm for a rate of \$10 per person with an optional lesson at 7:00 pm for an additional \$5 (less \$1 with a Resident Discount Card). Program changes to increase participation began in November 2007. A twilight dance was offered from 5:00 - 8:00 pm, a lesson was taught from 8:00 - 9:00 pm, followed by an evening dance from 9:00 pm to midnight. Each week has a different focus for the twilight and evening dances. As an example, some Saturdays start with a live ballroom trio followed by an Argentine Tango program. The new program is priced at \$15 for adults and \$12 for seniors and students; books of 10 tickets can be purchased for \$120 for adults or \$100 for students and seniors. The new format focused on different types of social dances attracting new participants. These formats aligned with several of the dance types offered in weeknight classes, allowing the weeknight lesson participants a venue to practice what they've learned in class.
- Results have been promising since the program change – average attendance increased from 44 to 115. The Saturday Night lessons are now instructed by a variety of teachers, including some of the regular weeknight dance class contractors. It has been common to see over 100 participants in the 9:00 pm lesson. Moreover, there is a mixture of adults and senior citizens on Saturday nights.
- Unrelated to the Saturday Night dances, but important to the local ballroom dance community, Patricia Ryan is stepping down as the weeknight ballroom dance instructor after an impressive 38 years of teaching at the Carrillo Recreation Center. Nigel Clarke has been contracted to teach ballroom dance group lessons beginning in April, 2008.

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