



**CITY OF SANTA BARBARA**  
**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT**

**AGENDA DATE:** October 23, 2019  
**TO:** Parks and Recreation Commission  
**FROM:** Recreation Division, Parks and Recreation Department  
**SUBJECT:** Recognition of Jonathan Bixby and Sylvia Sykes

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Commission recognize Jonathan Bixby and Sylvia Sykes for initiating the Santa Barbara Swing Dance Community and their dedication to supporting it for over 30 years.

**DISCUSSION:**

Jonathan Bixby and Sylvia Sykes met as teenagers in 1965, bonding over their shared love of dancing, particularly dances in old movies. Together they learned dance moves from watching those films, and when they discovered some of the original dancers lived in Los Angeles, they began taking lessons from them. The duo began competing in 1970 and won many competitions throughout the years, including receiving a first at the U.S. Open Swing Dance Championships. In 1979, they quit their jobs to pursue dance as a career. They began teaching many styles of dance, but their passion and enthusiasm for Swing, Lindy Hop, and Balboa drew many students and they focused on these dance styles. In 1989, "Jonathan and Sylvia Swing Dance" moved to the Carrillo Recreation Center, featuring classes and dances with live bands.

Sylvia and Jonathan's accolades include being inducted to the California and National Swing Dance Halls of Fame. Sylvia is also a two-time California Balboa Champion and a four-time winner of the Feather Award as the best female Lindy dancer in the U.S. In addition to their awards, Jonathan and Sylvia are recognized in dance communities worldwide for locating original dancers and reviving Balboa, a dance style that originated in Southern California in the 1920s. They learned from "the greats" and began teaching Balboa, saving it from becoming a lost dance form. Thanks to their efforts, Balboa is now studied worldwide. While continuing to teach Balboa in Santa Barbara, Sylvia is in high demand as an instructor at workshops around the country and worldwide, traveling year-round as far as Korea and Sweden.

Generations of Santa Barbara residents and visitors have enjoyed classes and dances organized by Jonathan and Sylvia in partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department. Their desire to share their love of dance with others and their dedication to the Santa Barbara swing dance community continues, with Sylvia teaching weekly classes and Jonathan

hosting Friday night dances at the Carrillo Recreation Center. Participant ages range from teens to eighties, and many “regulars” have participated for close to 30 years. The Department thanks Jonathan Bixby and Sylvia Sykes for providing outstanding, historical dance opportunities to the Santa Barbara community.

**PREPARED BY:** Jason Bryan, Senior Recreation Supervisor

**SUBMITTED BY:** Rich Hanna, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director

**APPROVED BY:** Jill E. Zachary, Parks and Recreation Director