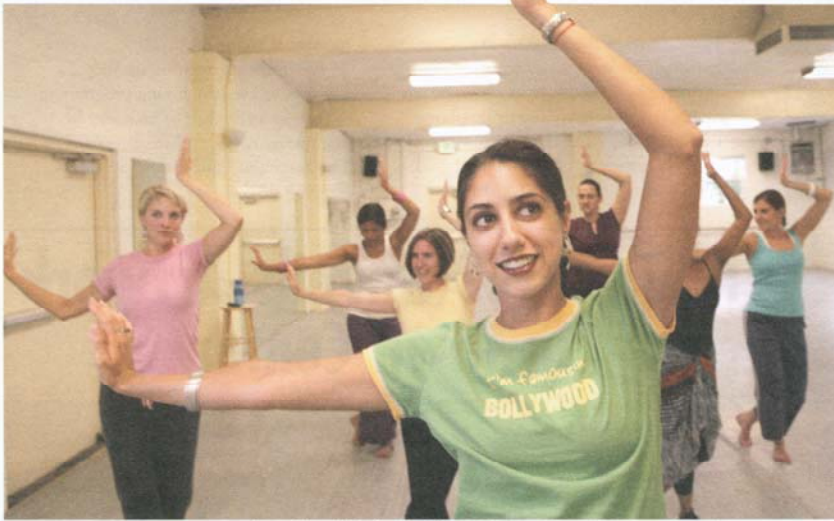


Hidden Resources In and Around Stapleton



Renu Kansal, Bollywood West Dance Classes

By Kathy Epperson

The opportunity to add a little flavor and pizzazz to our lives is sometimes easier than we think. To help connect our community with these opportunities is a continuation of our new Hidden Resources feature. This month we profile three people – a chef, a dance instructor, and a children’s art teacher – who contribute to the rich array of hidden resources in the greater Stapleton area.

Renu Kansal, Bollywood West Dance Classes

Stapleton resident Renu Kansal teaches Indian-fusion dance classes in her own program called Bollywood West. For those scratching their heads over the term Bollywood, first a primer. Bollywood is the name given to the Hindi-language film industry in India and is a huge pop-culture force there. These films are usually long musical extravaganzas, with songs and dances, love interests, comedy and dare-devil thrills. The name Bollywood comes from combining the city name Bombay (now known as Mumbai) with – you guessed it – Hollywood. Bollywood has all the same Hollywood star-crazy buzz, only with Indian flair and color.

Out of this film industry has come a modern form of Indian dance. Combining classical Indian dance with folk dancing plus Latino, Arabic and Western dance styles, Bollywood dancing carries strong theatrical expression. When Renu teaches her Bollywood dance classes, she teaches not only the movements, but also the stories and cultural elements behind them. “In India, dance and song are so much a part of every day life — in celebrations, weddings, holidays,” she explains. “Bollywood is so much more than films and dances, I find that my role isn’t just teaching dance; my students are so deeply interested in more than the movie, but all facets of the environment which comprise Bollywood culture.”

Renu recently moved with her husband Sonu to Denver from New York City, where she danced with New York’s first Bollywood dance company and performed at huge events and festivals. Her role as teacher and company manager has fully prepared her in starting this Bollywood West program, currently located at a shared dance studio at Broadway and Alameda. With several students from Stapleton, she is exploring expanding her classes in a neighborhood

location.

While physical fitness is a nice bonus of these classes, the emphasis is on the fun and cultural exploration. “The classes are all ‘beginning level’ because the style is new to everyone,” Renu says. “Some students love to dance and this is just another offering they want to sample. I have both male and female students, groups of girlfriends, mothers

with their daughters, couples... it really does reach everyone!”

With a mixed-race heritage and many relatives living in India, Renu has benefited from the Bollywood film and dance phenomenon as a cultural bridge with her own family. “My first encounter with Bollywood was many years ago, as I was planning to visit India,” Renu recounts. “I hadn’t been in 25 years, and in that time I’d never met many of my cousins. I was trying to learn more Hindi and watching a lot of Bollywood films to help pick up better conversational skills. I immediately fell in love with the dance sequences; it was amazing to see movies where people looked like me, and the fact that they all danced? Well, that was just the icing on the cake!” That preparation not only created an immediate connection with her relatives, but the start of a passion Renu now shares with others here in Denver.

For information on Bollywood West classes, contact Renu at 303-389-9832 or info@bollywoodwest.com or visit www.bollywoodwest.com.