

Learning the steps for that big dance



JOE AND CAROLINE GRACIA, a father-daughter team, dance during a lesson given by Lee Terry (center) at her Dartmouth studio.

By **GEORGE AUSTIN**

Everybody is going to be watching when the bride and the groom dance for the first time at the reception and so you do not want to be stepping on each other's feet. Lee Terry can make sure that you don't with a few private dance lessons at Healthtrax Fitness & Wellness in North Dartmouth.

"They usually come because they don't know how to dance and they want to dance at their wedding," Ms. Terry said of the couples she teaches. "They don't want to just stand in the middle of the floor and rock back and forth like they usually do."

After the couple picks out their song for the wedding, Ms. Terry choreographs a routine for that particular number. She usually gets very good reviews for the performance.

"They all say that people loved it," Ms. Terry said. "They got a standing ovation. People couldn't stop talking about it for the rest of the evening."

Ms. Terry said seeing the bride and groom dance so well at a wedding encourages other people at the reception to take lessons.

Ms. Terry said if a couple knows the basic steps, fewer dance lessons are needed.

"If they have had lessons already, they can do one or two classes of private lessons and do very well," Ms. Terry said. "If they come in not having had any ballroom instruction previously, it might take four or five classes. It depends on how much they practice at home."

A father and daughter are taking lessons with Ms. Terry for a special dance at her wedding.

Ms. Terry suggests to people to give dance lessons as a wedding shower gift.

"The Way You Look Tonight," by Frank Sinatra, has been the most requested wedding song, Ms. Terry said.

"That's a true ballroom fox trot, so that's a little easier to work with because it's very basic steps," Ms. Terry said.

Ms. Terry has been teaching one couple to dance to Celine Dion's "Power of Love" for their wedding.

"That is not a true ballroom song," Ms. Terry said. "I have to make it fit. It's a little harder for the couple because they don't have that traditional beat, but they

do it and it works out well."

Tracie Laboa and David Joseph, both of Fairhaven, have been taking lessons from Ms. Terry to learn how to dance to "Power of Love" at their wedding in front of 250 people at their reception. Ms. Laboa said Ms. Terry has been a "wonderful" teacher. She and her fiancé are learning the "rumba" for their wedding.

"It takes a lot of practice and a lot of patience, but we're doing pretty good," Ms. Laboa said.

Mr. Joseph said the tough part of the dance lessons is remembering the steps from week to week. But he said he feels like Ms. Terry has him and his fiancée prepared for their wedding.

Ms. Laboa danced as a child, but has not for many years. Mr. Joseph said he has done no dancing before the lessons. She said they will continue to take lessons after their wedding.

"It's great fun," Ms. Laboa said.

Ms. Terry also finds out the dimensions of the dance floor the bride and groom will be on during their reception when she is choreographing the dance routine. She makes a set routine for them so they know what they will be doing in certain locations on the floor.

Ms. Terry said many people who come to her for lessons say they do not have rhythm. One couple told her she was going to have a hard time teaching them because they were hopeless. But she said they discovered their rhythm. Ms. Terry said if people are even instinctively tapping their feet or fingers when they hear music, they have enough rhythm to dance well.

"I've never really met anyone in all the years that I've been doing this who does not have rhythm," Ms. Terry said. "They just think they don't, but they do and they are very happy to find out they do."

Ms. Terry, who also teaches disco and line dancing, said few people drop out of her classes. If they do, she said they are usually getting discouraged too soon. She said they usually feel good in beginners classes but sometimes get frustrated with more advanced dances. She says if they just hang in there, it all ends up making sense to them. Ms. Terry said they can have confidence problems or are just embarrassed to dance in front of people.

Ms. Terry has taught dancing since 1970. She had a modeling and finishing school in the 1980s. She said teaching dancing almost makes her immortal, because the young couples she gives lessons to will be dancing for many years after she is dead and will be having a good time doing it.

"I love teaching," Ms. Terry said. "It always say it's something I would do for nothing, but it's wonderful to get paid to do it."

Ms. Terry said when she taught in the modeling and finishing school, a lot of the girls were comparing each other to somebody else, saying they had prettier hair or eyes. She told them not to do that, but to just try to get better themselves each week. She said the same applies to dancing.

"Everyone comes in with different abilities," Ms. Terry said. "I could have several couples in the same class. Some have never danced at all. Some of danced their own style."

Ms. Terry said sometimes it is easier to teach dance to beginners. She said people who have been dancing their own style may have been doing steps the wrong way.

When Ms. Terry first came to Healthtrax 11 years ago, she had six couples in the class. She has built the program up to 100 couples. Ms. Terry said the number of students in the class decreased after the September 11th terrorist attacks.

"This year, I noticed that the registration started to pick up again," Ms. Terry said. "I'm sure that has to do with everything that has been on television, like Dancing with the Stars."

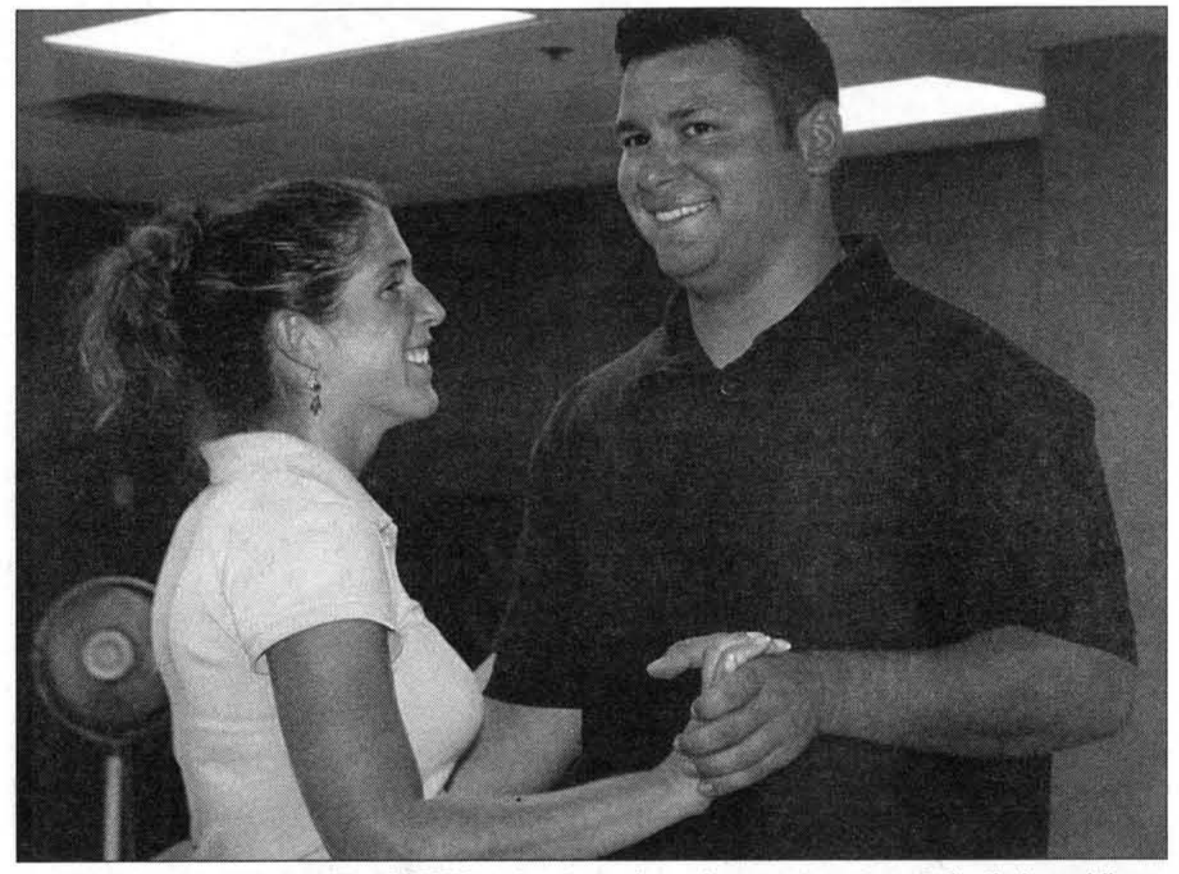
Ms. Terry said more younger people and men have been willing to come to ballroom dancing lessons in recent years. She said seeing someone, like football player Jerry Rice, on Dancing for the Stars encourages people to dance. Last summer, Ms. Terry had 34 students. This summer, that number has grown to 144 students who are taking her dance lessons in Dartmouth.

"My enrollment has increased tremendously," Ms. Terry said.

Ms. Terry said a majority of the couples that take lessons with her to get ready for their wedding, also do so after the big day.

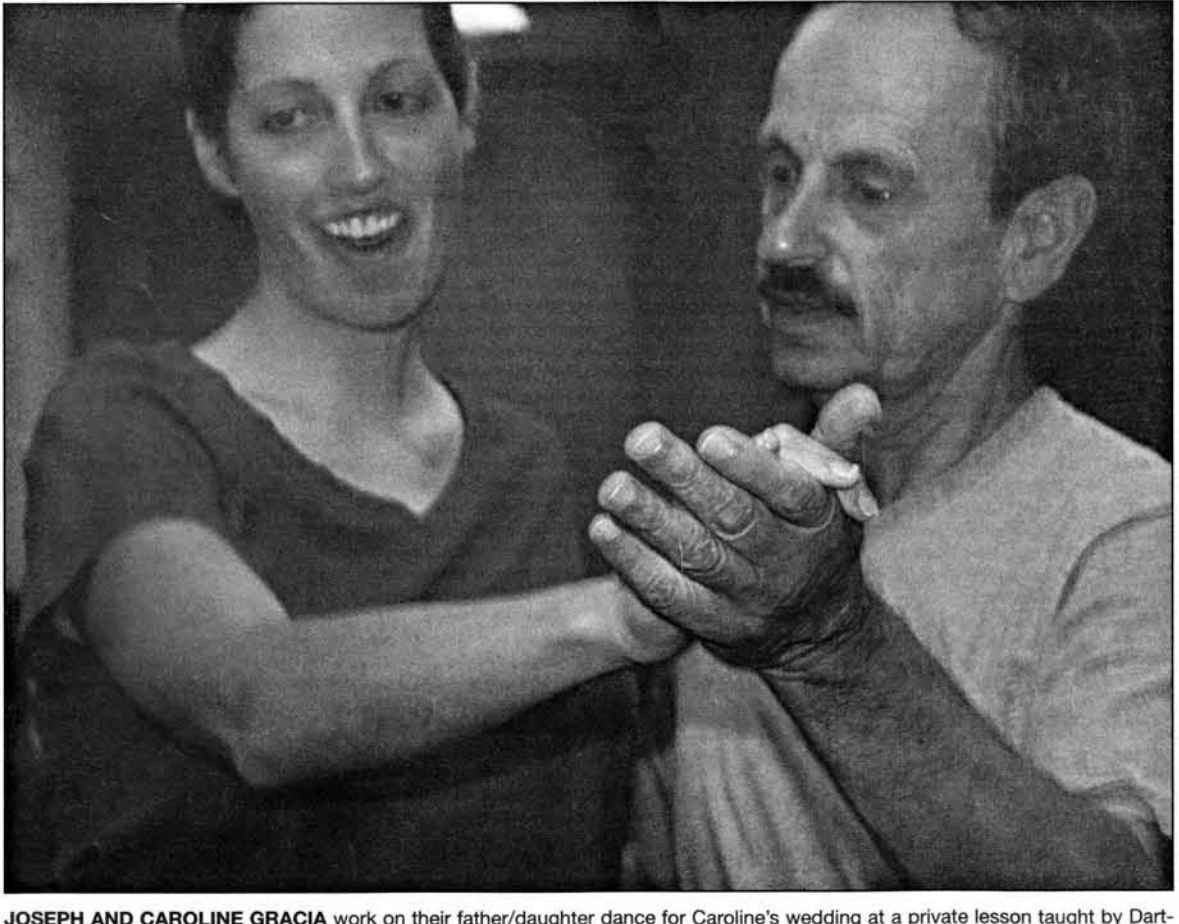
"They enjoy it so much and realize it's something they can do the rest of their lives together and have fun doing it," Ms. Terry said.

Dancing: Instructor can have you ready



TRACIE LABOA AND DAVID JOSEPH took private dance lessons to get ready for their wedding.

Terry: She can get bride and groom ready for dance



JOSEPH AND CAROLINE GRACIA work on their father/daughter dance for Caroline's wedding at a private lesson taught by Dartmouth instructor Lee Terry.