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Cape Fear Ballroom Dancers celebrate 20 years on the dance floor

[By Brian Dukes](#)

Staff writer

Andrew and Kalli Ziegler know how to boogie. And thanks to their time spent with the Cape Fear Ballroom Dancers, they also know how to waltz, foxtrot, tango and cha-cha.

The Cape Fear Ballroom Dancers, a group of ballroom dancing enthusiasts, recently celebrated its 20th anniversary with a dinner-and-dancing party at the Highland Country Club. Members and their guests enjoyed a formal dinner and then danced (some of) the night away to the sounds of Wilmington's five-piece Duke Ladd Band orchestra, which specializes in ballroom dance music.



For Andrew Ziegler, the club's president, the anniversary event was the perfect way to celebrate the group's promotion and enjoyment of all things ballroom since it was founded in 1993.

"The group has come a long way and thrived, thanks to the passion our members share for ballroom dancing," said Andrew Ziegler. "It's been a pleasure to be a part of this. I look forward to the next twenty years."

The Cape Fear Ballroom Dancers group has an active roster of nearly 80 members, a far cry from the dozen founding members who met while taking dance lessons at the former Fred Astaire studio and decided to form a social club based on their shared affection for ballroom dancing.

The club officially organized in September 1993 and held its first major shindig - a Harvest Ball - at the former Prince Charles Hotel. The ball was a success, attracting dozens of new members.



As the club grew, events would vary locations, from the Holiday Inn Bordeaux to the Gates Four Country Club and the Elks Club. The club currently hosts monthly dances at Roland's Dance Studio on Hope Mills Road.

Previous club president Chip Modlin, who joined the group with his wife, Merle, said seeing the club's evolution has been a joy.

"It's become something of an institution in the community," said Chip Modlin. "It's something we love - who doesn't love dancing? It was a lot of fun, but dancing also offers so many benefits."

The Modlins are quick to tout the positive mental and physical benefits of dancing, which they're equally enthusiastic about sharing with others. The couple has had ample opportunity to share their passion, having performed ballroom dancing demonstrations with the club at various events, theatrical performances and festivals over the past 20 years.

"We've danced at a lot of different venues and people love it," said Merle Modlin. "We get to tell them about how it helps keep our bodies and minds active, and that's important at our age."

The Modlins said they discovered their passion for dancing after taking a ballroom dance class on a whim at Fayetteville Technical Community College. One class was all it took to get the couple hooked.

"Once you get dancing in your blood, it doesn't go away," said Chip Modlin. "And it's something you can do with friends, for fun, or for competition."

After joining the Cape Fear Ballroom Dancers, the Modlins traveled to England with a group of friends and fellow ballroom dancers to compete in a ballroom dancing event. The couple also competed in the first ever Dancing With the Fayetteville Stars charity dance competition.

"We didn't win," said Merle Modlin of the competition in England. "But we got to see these awesome dancers from all over the world, and we knew we were going to stick with this."

The Zieglers, similarly, enjoyed dancing, but put off ballroom dance lessons for years - until romantic inspiration struck. As a wedding anniversary present, Andrew bought a beginner's package of ballroom dance lessons for his wife.

"It was the most romantic gift I'd ever received," said Kalli Ziegler. "It was something I always wanted to do, and now we could do it together."

The gift was well-received.

"I was a hero," said Andrew Ziegler. "We took lessons as a couple, so we learned the same things at the same time. That meant we'd always be able to dance together."

Not long after completing their lessons in early 1996, the Zieglers joined the Cape Fear Ballroom Dancers as a way to put their lessons to use, as well as a way to socialize and meet new people.

"We spent our money, learned the steps and then we had a place to use them all the time," said Andrew Ziegler. "The club was very attractive for us. We're so fortunate to be part of it."

That initial involvement led to the Zieglers taking a larger role in the club over the years. Andrew is the current president, a job he readily admits he could never do without his wife's assistance.

"We're in lock step with one another about doing whatever we can to support the club," said Kalli Ziegler. "We consider ourselves ballroom dance ambassadors."

The couple has a history of marching - or dancing - to the beat of the same drum. The Zieglers met while students in the marching band at Florida State University - he was a drummer, while she played saxophone and piano. Their innate sense of rhythm and understanding of tempo helps the couple when it comes to dancing.

"I think there's an advantage to having a musical background," said Andrew Ziegler. "I think we were able to pick up the timing of the different ballroom dances pretty quickly."

Both couples agreed that popular TV programs such as "Dancing With the Stars" have helped raise the visibility of ballroom dancing. But they added that the shows have fostered an atmosphere of high-pressure competition and compressed learning curves that might turn people away. Kalli Ziegler said ballroom dancing doesn't have to be that way.

"Ballroom dancing is for everyone," said Kalli Ziegler. "It's something anyone can do. It just takes practice. You might step on toes, but everyone does that when they start."

INFORMATION

For more about the Cape Fear Ballroom Dancers, go to capefearballroomdancers.org or call 987-4420.

Staff writer Brian Dukes can be reached at dukesb@fayobserver.com or 486-3523.

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