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Belly dancing instructor Laura Grunert conducts a class for Germantown and Menomonee Falls students at Germantown's Public Works building Aug. 23. "It's really good for toning," Grunert said about belly dancing.

Navel action

Woman instructs class on art of belly dancing

By John Neville
Staff Writer

By day, the fair skinned Menomonee Falls woman holds down a plain-as-vanilla-ice-cream job — a technical support employee for an area software firm.

Evenings, though, are different.

That's when the suburban wife and mother is transformed into a belly dancer or belly dancing instructor, depending on the day.

After sunset she's known in belly dancing circles as Galatea

and regularly performs in the Milwaukee and Chicago areas. To family and friends, though, she goes by her better known name: Laura Grunert.

An American citizen born and raised in the state of New York, Grunert fills her Wednesday evenings teaching a beginning belly dancing class at the Germantown Department of Public Works Building. She will teach an intermediate class this fall.

"It's a good time to be in the belly dancing biz," Grunert said



Kelly Kling (background) and Lisa Hoebel, both of Germantown, practice some belly dancing moves during a recreation class.



Dancing

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in a recent interview. "We're having quite a little renaissance going. It's the new groovin' thing."

Grunert said she selected her dance name because it accurately describes her, at least physically.

"Galatea is a Greek word that means pale or milk white. I took the name because I dance with a lot of people who are of Mediterranean or Eastern descent or they tan well. I'm really, really pale. I glow in the dark next to them," Grunert said.

Lights the flame of her soul

A member of the Chicago chapter of the Middle Eastern Culture and Dance Association, Grunert has danced for many years, including tap, jazz and ballet. She began taking belly dancing lessons and attending workshops more than three years ago.

"I started belly dancing just for fitness and as something fun to do," she explained. "But then I started to get real serious about it."

Belly dancing quickly became a second career. A former advertising agency management executive, Grunert left that job less than a year ago to devote more time to dance and instruction.

She also routinely performs at restaurants, staged shows and private parties.

Grunert began teaching belly dancing about a year ago. Besides teaching area recreation department belly dancing classes, she also is an instructor at a local private dance studio and gives private or semi-private lessons at her home studio.

"It's in the basement. If you can shimmy too far to the left you bump into the dryer," she said.

Grunert's studio, known as Galatea Middle Eastern Dance, is the one that lights the flame of her soul.

"I just do the tech support to help make ends meet," she said.

Grunert is also able to work from her home for her technical support job.

'For any age, any size'

Every Wednesday evening, Grunert greets 20 women of a wide variety of ages and sizes to

teach the beginning belly dancing class, instructing them in the intricacies of the 'shimmy' and the 'camel.'

Grunert said you don't have to be a dance maven to learn belly dancing.

"It's for any age, any size. One of the best belly dancers I know is a size 20 if she's a pound. It's not like ballet, where you have to have a certain body type to do well at it," she said.

Grunert explained the beginning class is more about learning moves and does not yet involve major aerobic activity.

"We mainly stay in one spot and learn the different hip and upper body articulations," she said. "It's really good for toning."

Grunert said her husband, Michael, a master control operator at an area television station, does not belly dance. A longtime guitarist, he did once accompany his wife to one of her belly dancing performances.

There are some male belly dancers, although their numbers are modest. In fact, Grunert has a friend who teaches an all-male belly dancing class in Milwaukee.

"I've never taught a man belly

dancing, but I would be open to having a male student," Grunert said.

Moving up to the next level

Co-sponsored by the Germantown and Menomonee Falls recreation departments, the class has an equal number of students from both communities.

Germantown resident Lisa Hoebel is taking Grunert's beginner's class again. Actually, it's her third time.

"I keep taking it because it's a lot of fun. It's fun to be around with other women," she said. "It helps keep me in pretty good shape."

A sales assistant for an area firm, Hoebel is also signed up for Grunert's intermediate class.

"We'll be learning different moves and putting steps together," she said in an interview after a recent belly dancing class.

Hoebel also takes swing lessons at the Ale House in downtown Milwaukee. She said she would like to become accomplished enough at belly dancing to dance publicly.

"I'd like to be able to maybe dance in a Mediterranean restaurant," she said.