

# PUT A LITTLE FUN IN YOUR LIFE... TRY DANCING

Celebrating 100 years, Arthur Murray Dance continues the love of dance generations later.

by Linda Barrett



**D**o you think you're too awkward to ballroom dance? So did Arthur Murray. He was shy and self-conscious about his lanky frame and seriously afraid to dance with girls.

That's when a friend he admired (due to his popularity with the women) took him aside and taught him his first dance steps. Murray practiced wherever he could, often attending weddings to dance with women of all ages.

It was 1912 and Murray was working as a draftsman by day, dancing at night, and teaching ballroom dancing in Atlanta, GA when reportedly, politician William Jennings Bryan made a casual remark, telling Murray that he had a fine idea on how to make money. "Just teach 'em with the left foot and don't tell 'em what to do with the right foot until they pay up!"

Murray took the suggestion to heart and developed a mail-order teaching guide using footprint diagrams that people could place on the floor showing just where to place each foot. The idea took off, and over 500,000 were sold. His next venture was to franchise branded dance lessons.

Murray even broadcast dance lessons over the radio, and it was during a live broadcast he spotted his future wife Kathryn Kohnfelder in the audience. They married, Kathryn became Arthur's dance partner, and together they began to open schools around the country. Eventually they hosted the popular televised dance show: *The Arthur Murray Party*.

## Love Strikes Again

Nick Theiss was teaching at his own dance studio when love struck him as well, when his wife-to-be, Pauline, came into the studio as a teacher applicant. They married, had children, and started opening dance studios in Wisconsin, Des Moines, and Atlantic City before settling in Northern Virginia about 35 years ago.

Their sons, current D.C. Metro-area Arthur Murray Dance Centers owners Steve and Mark, remember how their own

story began. "We were like military brats—Arthur Murray brats—growing up," Mark says. "We hung around the schools, and I had to take lessons with my sister. I hated it!"

The boys were "all boy," and preferred spending their time developing their passion for motorcycle racing and other "guy stuff."

Then during their college years, their father asked them to come work in the business during summer breaks. "I wasn't that keen on it, but I was interested in dating one of the teachers, so I did it," Mark says. He was in his 20s and fell in love with the business—but didn't end up with the teacher. (He did meet his wife through dance though, when an employee invited a friend to guest night to meet him.)

Steve, on the other hand, had turned to the landscaping and construction field. Then at age 24, he asked if he could join the family business. His father said, "Come back only if you're going to stick with it." He's been there ever since.

Their parents went on to become leaders in the Arthur Murray world, innovating what is now the 45-minute lesson and refining training techniques. Other family members were influential as well. Their uncle George B. Theiss was President of Arthur Murray International, and his wife Georgia remains on the board.

## Arthur Murray Dance Centers Locally

From parents to sons to now Steve's daughter Jennifer, the Theisses are stalwarts in the Arthur Murray community. As Arthur Murray master franchisers, they own seven studios in Chevy Chase, Silver Spring, Gaithersburg, and Columbia, MD, plus Tysons Corner, and Ashburn, and Alexandria, VA—the number one Arthur Murray franchise in the world for 17 years.

What sets Arthur Murray Dance Centers apart is that all employees are full-time, highly-trained professionals. Arthur Murray also offers non-binding agreements for lessons

and allows students to schedule lessons at their own convenience. "Most of what we do is private lessons, with groups designed to supplement them," Mark says.

Students also enjoy weekly dance parties, showcase dances, and special off-site events. Themed dances are held regularly; a recent series celebrating "Dancing Through the Decades" featured the music and dance styles of each decade since Arthur Murray's began. Students do not need to bring a partner, and all ages are welcome.

### Dancing Will Change Your Life

"Dancing can literally change your life," Mark says. "It is a great way to enjoy the stress release and physical benefits of exercise without going to the gym." Dancing is also a great social outlet that builds confidence in several ways: balance, stamina, social interaction, and achievement.

"When the music is on, you can literally see people's feet tapping. Our music makes you want to get up and dance. You can't help but be in a good mood," Mark says. The studios play a variety of music styles from modern hits to classis dance tunes.

Instructors are friendly and professional, allowing students to feel an immediate comfort level. Early lessons are generally private, and when students feel more confident, they are encouraged to join group dances. Dancers work their way through Bronze, Silver, and Gold skill levels, and have opportunities to compete.

"When I was teaching, I enjoyed watching someone go from not knowing the first thing about dance to actually being able to dance," Steve says. "We also see people who come in to learn dancing for a wedding, and end up staying just for the fun of it."

And yes, people even find romance at Arthur Murray. Several couples have met and married there, but even more re-ignite the spark in their marriage. "We see it all the time," Mark says. "The woman starts wearing more makeup, the man becomes more confident, they start flirting again ... It's like date night out."

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*The Arthur Murray Party* aired intermittently from 1950 to 1960, and at the end of each show, Kathryn Murray told the audience, "Put a little fun in your life ... try dancing." She then held up her arms to her husband Arthur, and they waltzed offstage.

Put a little fun in your life and visit Arthur Murray.

## Want to Try Dancing?

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[www.arthurmurraydc.com](http://www.arthurmurraydc.com)

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