

Dancing to the beat of their own drums

Pawtucket's Rhody Center for World Music and Dance holds open house with 'try-it' classes

By ERICA MOSER
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PAWTUCKET – Walk to the second floor of the Pawtucket Armory Arts Center on a Tuesday night and you'll find Karolina Salih leading a belly dance, a pile of kicked-off shoes behind her and a row of mirrors in front of her.

The seven mirrors on wheels form a wall in front of a wooden door. It's a real door, but it's also a metaphorical door to another culture, considering something very different from belly dancing is taking place on the other side: steel drumming.

Kyle Forsthoff is teaching a few kids, including Luke DaPonte, a 10-year-old from Johnston. DaPonte's mother heard about the steel pan class after taking yoga classes elsewhere in the middle.

"It's just fantastic to see him learning about the notes and patterns," said Luke's father, Mark DaPonte. "I feel like it's just such a fun instrument no one else takes."

Belly dancing and steel pan ensemble are just two of many music and dance classes offered at The Rhody Center for World Music and Dance, which Julie Raimondi founded in 2013. As the Center kicks off its September-October session, it's holding "try-it" classes through Monday.

The classes, most of which are \$14 for a single session, are a way for people to try out a tap or flamenco or Bollywood class before committing to 6-8 sessions.

"For quite a long time now we've done only enrollment classes," Raimondi explained. "Teachers are able to build more and more each week."

She added that having classes that run for several weeks "also helps to foster more of a sense of community." But Raimondi gets that people may not want to sign up for a class without trying it first.

The Rhody Center is offering several try-it classes for kids and adults in the rest of the week:



Photos by Erica Moser

Above: Kyle Forsthoff teaches students to play the steel pans this week at the Rhody Center for World Music and Dance, located in the Pawtucket Armory. The center is in the midst of a week-long offering of 'try-it' classes.

Right: Karolina Salih teaches beginner and intermediate belly dancing.



Thursday: Hip Hop for Adult Beginners, 6-7 p.m., \$14

Thursday: West African Dance, 8:15-9:15 p.m., \$14

Sunday: Bollywood Dance for Youth, 3-4 p.m., \$10

Monday: Intro to Flamenco, 6-7 p.m., \$14

Monday: Ukulele Ensemble for Adult Beginners I, 7:05-8:05 p.m., \$14

It's also offering a Saturday Strummers class for ukulele players on Sept. 17 from 3-4 p.m., for \$8.

Each try-it class is offered at the same time as it will be in the following weeks. For more information and to sign up, visit therhodycenter.org.

Most adult classes are \$98 for seven sessions. The exceptions are Intro to Flamenco and Ukulele Ensemble for Adult Beginners I, which are \$84 for six sessions. In addition, Uke Jam is \$40 for eight sessions while Saturday Strummers is \$48 for six sessions.

Raimondi, who works in hotel management during the day, teaches the ukulele classes. For Ukulele Ensemble for Adult Beginners I, all that is necessary to bring is a ukulele: students don't need to know how to read music.

Those who have passed Ukulele Ensemble for Adult Beginners II, have had about a dozen private lessons or go through an audition can join Saturday Strummers or Uke Jam.

Raimondi is also particularly excited for Intro to Flamenco, since The Rhody Center just began offering flamenco classes last month, after she had spent upwards of three years searching.

She said people may find it surprising that most of the classes are for adults, adding that The Rhody Center always wants to be beginner-friendly.

"It can be really intimidating to go somewhere where there are profes-

sional-level dancers and you have to go in and compete with that," she said, "so I think that's why people like us so much."

The Rhody Center's next try-it classes will be in January. Its sessions run September-October, November-December, January-February and March-April, with one-month sessions in the summer.

In the future, Raimondi hopes to add more classes and get the entire operation under the nonprofit arm. Right now, only the Community Steel Pan Ensemble for Youth, Community Steel Pan Ensemble for

Drumming Ensemble operate under the nonprofit arm.

The youth steel pan ensemble is free, while the other two are offered under a sliding scale donation structure.

"We're really about the skills, and all the teachers are top of the line, excellent," Raimondi said of the classes in general. "It is about having fun as well, just getting out and trying something new."

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Wildlife

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"We're just hoping to help educate the community, bring these issues and topics to their attention and maybe educate them in a fun way by allowing them to actually make the connection between what they're reading on paper and what they're hearing about the actual animals that will be in front of them," Russak said.

Meanwhile Greg Gerritt – watershed steward for the Moshassuck River and writer of the blog Prosperity for RI – will be talking about capturing nature on video, at 11:30 a.m.

While Gerritt has never taken a video class or had any training, he has posted more than 250 videos on his YouTube channel, moshassuckcritters, since getting into video about four years ago.

Gerritt mostly takes videos of the

wildlife in the North Burial Ground in Providence. He remembers walking there several years ago and seeing tadpoles in the pond.

"I started watching them, and I realized, as telegenic as they were, somebody should do a video of them, and I thought it would be a great thing for a kids' program," he said. "But because of the location of the burial ground, there are no programs within an easy walking distance of there, and after a couple of years, it just seemed like I should do it."

Gerritt plans to talk about what has and hasn't worked for him, and to prepare budding nature videographers for what they may run into.

At 1:30 p.m., Kathryn Parent of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation will be holding an interactive guessing game with audience members, about animal skulls. She will also be talking about wildlife tracks at a table throughout the day.

After Parent's presentation, Derek

Lirange of the Worcester Tree Initiative will lead a guided walk in the woods, and talk about different tree species and putting trees in urban landscapes.

The full schedule of talks and walks is as follows:

- 8:30 a.m. – "Birding Along the Blackstone" with Rosanne Sherry

- 9:30 a.m. – "A Sewer with History? Biodiversity and the Blackstone" with NPS Ranger Andy Schmetzer

- 10 a.m. – "Changing Our Planet's Future" with Earth Ltd. At Southwick's Zoo

- 10:30 a.m. – "Enviroscape Program: Keeping Our Water Clean" with Julie Riendeau

- 11 a.m. – guided bike patrol ride via the NPS Volunteers-in-Parks Program, departing from the Rte. 295 Visitor's Center

- 11:30 a.m. – "How to Capture Nature on Film" with Greg Gerritt of Prosperity for RI

- 1 p.m. – "Environmental

Hazards" with Mark Dennen of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

- 1:30 p.m. – "Skull Science" with Kathryn Parent of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

- 2 p.m. – "Guided Walk in the Woods" with Derek Lirange of the Worcester Tree Initiative

- 2:30 p.m. – "Mushroom Hunting" with Ryan Bouchard of the Southern New England Mushroom Hunters

- 3:30 p.m. – summary of findings

Aside from this schedule, a number of other partners will have tables. This includes Blackstone Heritage Corridor, Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park, Northwest Rhode Island Supporters of Open Space, Envirothon, Fifteen Minute Field Trips, Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development, Rhode Island Rivers Council, Save the Bay, Trout Unlimited, and Woonasquatucket River Watershed

Council.

Northwest Rhode Island Supporters of Open Space will be bringing equipment used to gather and identify insects.

"Anybody who's interested can do a little hunting around the Kelly Farm property, and come back and see if they can figure out what they've caught," group member Lili Feinstein said.

Blackstone Heritage Corridor, Inc. will be promoting a few of its programs, such as Fish Responsibly, Trash Responsibly and Volunteers-in-Parks.

The Biodiversity Festival will also include nature journaling, a hands-on activity to learn about different kinds of leaves, and a science station with various observation tools and critter keepers. The Captain Wilbur Kelly House will be offering tours.

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Local restaurant closes — because of too much business

Owners of Mendon Road's GottaQ can't keep up with demand

By ERICA MOSER
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CUMBERLAND – Due to a staffing shortage, the GottaQ BBQ Smokehouse brick-and-mortar restaurant at 2000 Mendon Road is closed until further notice.

While restaurants often close due to a decline in business, GottaQ is having the opposite problem: demand is high for catering and the food truck, especially at festivals, and Mike Strout and Anthony Mardenly are too busy with those operations to also run the restaurant.

"He and I are the only two available during the day," Strout said, "and the food truck, the festivals [and] the catering are booked solid, booked crazy."

GottaQ BBQ Smokehouse opened in January, an expansion upon its food truck and catering business. The restaurant had been operating with college students serving as its summer staff. Now that those students have returned to school, the company is finding itself short-handed.

The restaurant has been closed since last week, when GottaQ was at the Rhythm and Roots Festival in Charlestown.



File photo

The owners of Cumberland-based GottaQ have been so swamped with food truck business that they've had to temporarily close their brick-and-mortar location.

GottaQ is looking for four employees, each of whom will work about 36 hours per week. The restaurant schedule is Tuesday-Friday 11-5, Strout said, but two of the positions will require the flexibility

to work some weekend hours on the food truck.

Those interested in the position should call Mike Strout at 508-954-7726 or Anthony Mardenly at 401-230-5006.

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