

# Parkinson's Support Group exploring benefits of dance

STEVE LEBLANC

sleblanc@metroland.com

Humming a few bars of Teddy Bear Picnic, Susan Bevers' mobility suddenly improves.

If there's anyone who can truly appreciate the inspiration/psychological boost derived from a simple childhood tune it's this Miltonian, who's still adjusting to a new reality since being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease three years ago.

"It was one of my favourite songs growing. I use to shuffle a lot (when walking), but I just start humming it and my walking's much better."

Husband Chuck agrees.

"She's not exactly Usain Bolt, but there has been a measurable improvement."

The Teddy Bear Picnic therapy recently took root at the Dance Class, where Susan is reaping the bene-



fits of a new offering by the Parkinson's Support Group of Milton.

Run by certified instructors Dianne Long and Lilly Petru, Dancers With PD is a specially-tailored program for those living with Parkinson's — or other neurological disorders — and their spouses/caregivers.

Embracing the philosophy that limitation shouldn't be a barrier to participation, the dozen or so local 'dancers' began meeting this past fall for Tuesday afternoon sessions that are equal parts

uplifting, empowering and amusing.

Of course fun is pretty much a foregone conclusion when mimicking a backwards float or some scarf-wielding ballet movements — the men showing particular enthusiasm and even a little grace during the latter.

"Our motto is 'There's no mistakes, only solos.' You might be the only one doing a certain move, but that doesn't make it wrong," explained Long, a lifelong dance instructor who travelled to Cleveland in 2013 to get her Dancers



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Joanne MacKinnon, above, participates with her husband Grant MacKinnon during the Parkinson's Support Group of Milton's dance class at the Dance Class Studio. Above left, Linda Green leads the mirrored action activity at the studio.

With PD certification after being told about the then burgeoning program. She now runs classes in both Milton and Cambridge. "It's all about muscle memory from childhood and finding those keys of imagery through music and movement (like with songs like You Are My Sunshine)."

Movements (either standing or seated) are always done to an individual's own limits — in a structured but casual atmosphere — with plenty of encouragement to go around.

Whether it be through an introduction to the tango, some warm-up foot work repetition or class-ending plies, group members enjoy the strengthen-

ing of muscles, increased flexibility and boosted stamina.

And that's just the physical benefits.

"It's great that there's this group here where everyone shares the same affliction and can get such pleasure and fellowship from it," said John Dundass, a regular at the class with wife Joanne.

"It's like we're comrades in arms."

Linda Green — co-facilitator of the local support group with husband Ken — admits that it's some times a challenge to get people out for that first class, with the men usually being the more resistant ones.

But that reluctance — more often that not —

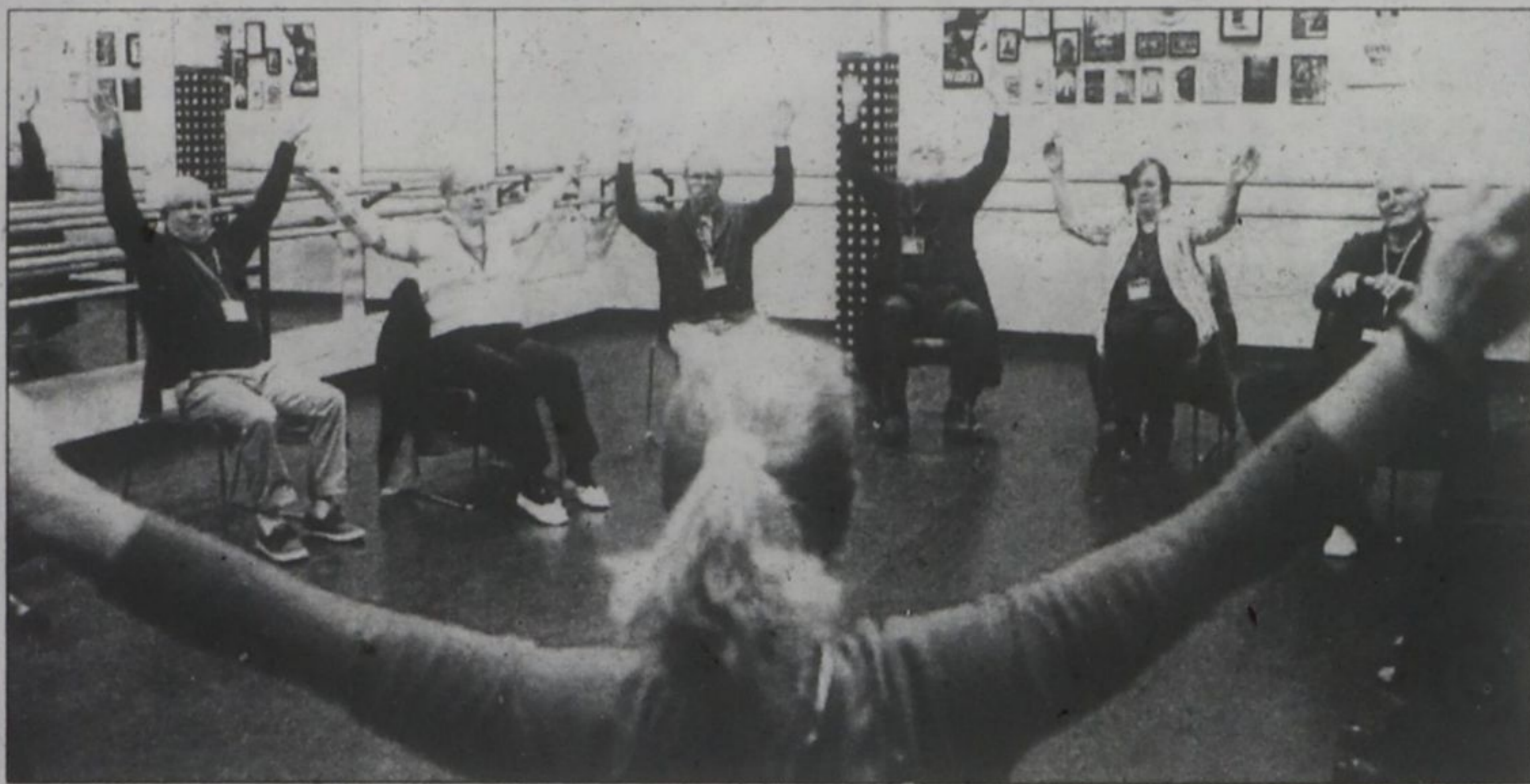
quickly fades once the toes start tapping and the supportive revelry ensues.

"Not at all," said John, when asked if he had any initial qualms about trying out Dancers With PD.

"My guys get as much out of the classes as my girls," said Long. "I love it."

Added Petru, "Dance is the hidden language of the soul of the body. When I dance I forget everything else and I just feel completely happy to share my joy of dance."

Those interested in joining the class, whether couples or individuals, can just show up at the Dance Class (8750 Regional Rd. 25), but are also invited to call Linda Green at 289-851-8655 for more information.



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Lilly Petru leads the group in the sun salutation during the Parkinson's Support Group of Milton's dance class at the Dance Class Studio.

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