

# Parents learn steps to help children

From page 16.

prompted a huge surge of interest in the centuries-old art form, which includes reels, jigs and Ceili dancing, according to Yvonne Kelly-Gunovski, who, with partner Joanne Vanderloo, runs the Irish Dance Studio on Bayview Avenue in Newmarket.

Close to 300 students pass through the studio every year for lessons, both recreational and competitive.

Two-time Canadian champion Brandi Campbell, 17, of Holland Landing is a student and, this year, the studio is sending 45 dancers to the Canadian "feis" Nov. 8 to 10 in Niagara Falls.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Staff writer Kathleen Griffin learns Irish dancing with the help of Yvonne Kelly-Gunovski and Emily Alexander, 14, at the Irish Dance Studio in Newmarket.

Well, maybe not. But I don't think I completed a sevens correctly even once.

The three-step was a tad better and I found it easier to listen to the music and rely on my sense of rhythm rather than concentrate too hard on what my traitorous feet were doing.

Once I relaxed a bit, it seemed to come a little easier. I didn't wipe out.

Classes aren't all geared to children; the Irish Dance Studio runs at least one adult class of about 16 people each year.

"We don't schedule them until October, until we see what the numbers are," Ms. Kelly-Gunovski said.

"Some students are parents who want to learn more so they

can help their kids, but many are people who have seen it and just want to try it."

"A lot of laughing goes on in those classes," added Ms. Vanderloo.

"Some of it's frustration, but most are there to have a good time and they do."

Classes run September to June, a half-hour a week for \$300 and an hour a week for \$410 at the beginner's level.

For more information, call the Irish Dance Studio at 1-905-898-0061.

Been There, Done That is a regular feature that follows the exploits of staff as they try to keep up with experts in a variety of sports and recreational activities.

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But, for me, the lesson was definitely recreational. I learned the skip (skip, two, three, hop) and the sevens, during which you travel across the floor sideways, then three-step backward twice.

I felt I could really get the hang of it, until I realized we were dancing to the music at half-time.

"OK, let's try it now," Ms. Kelly-Gunovski said, as the music sped up and the steps had to be done twice as fast.

"There is no such thing as the word 'can't' here."

# Any age can compete in trials

From page 16.

pace. There's a lot of strategy involved. You have to know your dog," Ms. MacLachlan said.

She and Boomer train at least once a week for one hour with Sue Miller, a renowned agility judge and competitor in Uxbridge. As well, the pair practises daily in Ms. MacLachlan's backyard with jumps and weave poles.

"I try to be as creative as possible with what equipment I have available," she said.

Mr. Boudreault and Spirit, who finished fourth in jumpers at the nationals in the 22-inch class, practise year-round. During winter, they go to an indoor facility in Pickering.

"When I did it for the first time I enjoyed it. It's a fabulous sport. It's addictive. You get hooked on it and the dog that I tried to build confidence in became very outgoing," said Mr. Boudreault of his initiation to agility trials five years ago.

"I came to the sport while looking for something fun to do with my high-energy dogs," said Ballantrae, resident Arlene Lehmann, who competes with

Biba, a giant schnauzer, the only one of her breed in Canada to attain her agility trial champion title, and Tommy, a miniature schnauzer.

"I love the challenge of the sport, physically and mentally. I love the outdoor aspect and the fact that while at a trial I usually get to go for at least one hike and a swim with my dogs which they so obviously enjoy."

*'I see these competitions growing huge by leaps and bounds. The more publicity it gets the bigger it'll be.'*

"Agility competitions keep (dogs) busy and it makes them better dogs," said Carole Leclerc of Aurora, who competes with a two-year-old fox terrier.

Mr. Boudreault likes agility trials because handlers of all ages can participate with varying degrees of competitiveness.

"You can make it as competitive as you want to make it and it can be done by youngsters, too," he said.

During competitions, which generally take place from March to October, Ms. Lehmann said handlers offer each other encouragement.

"As a group, we cheer for each other and rejoice in each title earned. It requires a great deal of manpower to put on a trial (including course building, scribes, timers, bar and chute setters, leash runner and computer tabulations). So, as everybody helps out, there is a Spirit of Agility, which was chosen as the slogan of this year's nationals."

While the sport doesn't yet offer lucrative financial rewards, Mr. Boudreault feels agility trials have plenty of room to flourish.

Offering encouragement is the AAC, which was founded in 1988 and currently has more than 4,500 dogs registered to compete at its trials across Canada.

"I see these competitions growing huge by leaps and bounds. The more publicity it gets the bigger it'll be. Every year there's at least a good dozen new people who try (agility competitions)," Mr. Boudreault said.

For more information, visit the AAC website at [www.aac.ca](http://www.aac.ca).

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