

Posted on Mon, Apr 7, 2008

La Cantina heats it up

Mexican restaurant offers Latin salsa dance lessons

By NEIL KIRBY, The Saratogian



Instructors Patricia Zeccola and Juan Soler, center, lead salsa dancing Thursday at La Cantina on Broadway. At left, Casey Irving of Saratoga Springs practices a spin with Jake Rodden of Portsmouth, N.H. (ED BURKE/The Saratogian)

SARATOGA SPRINGS — If you happen to visit La Cantina, the Mexican-themed restaurant at

430 Broadway, on April 17, expect tables to be pushed aside to make way for crowds of gyrating bodies.

Owners Heath and Jeff Ames first began hosting Latin salsa lessons at their restaurant in February to help Saratogians combat winter blues. “We thought during those long months it would give people a place to get out and do something different,” Heath Ames said. “Next year we’ll probably start it in January.”

Lessons are taught by Patricia Zeccola, a formally trained dance expert from Arthur Murray Dance Studio. Zeccola has been training for nearly a decade in Mexico, Brazil and Italy through various study abroad programs. “Evenings out in Mexico don’t only include going to a bar,” Zeccola said. Mexicans would more commonly visit the town plaza where a live band would play several times per week. Zeccola tagged along to watch and learn.

“It’s not always just about the football game or whatever is on TV; it’s more about the people you’re with. Dancing gives you the opportunity to interact with people,” Zeccola said.

Heath and Jeff Ames at La Cantina have tried to recreate this experience.

“People who are not veteran salsa dancers can have a night out and feel confident on the dance floor,” Heath said. “We give them the opportunity to do that.”

“It’s a place for people to go dancing that’s not the club scene,” Zeccola said. “There are not many places you can really go around here where you can have something to drink and eat and then dance.”

La Cantina opened in June of last year when the Ames moved back to Saratoga County after residing in California for a number of years. “I looked around for a place, and my husband’s words were, ‘I’m not getting back into the restaurant business.’ But then the location became available, and we wanted to get our Mexican craving taken care of. Now we get all the Mexican food we can eat.”

Latin dance lessons are held every other Thursday, with the next scheduled for April 17. Sensemaya, a Latin and jazz-influenced band, will provide live music beginning at 7. The band generally goes on break around 9, when Zeccola begins group instructions for 30 to 45 minutes. The band then returns and plays until 11. The events are open to the public and do not require a reservation.