

Ballroom dancers team up with American Legion in Kenner to honor veterans

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Kerry Lovell, right, with wife Diana, right, and the rest of the USA Gumbo ballroom dance group are planning a dance to benefit veterans.

Honoring our veterans seemed like a good cause for Kerry Lovell's organization to support.

"We were looking for a way to celebrate National Ballroom Dancing Week and wanted to do something to reach out to the community other than dance," Lovell said. So USA Dance Gumbo Chapter 5031 teamed up with American Legion Kenner Post 377 to give local wounded warriors something extra for their service to our country.

On Sept. 26 from 7 to 11 p.m., the two organization will come together to hold a "Fundraiser to Benefit Local Wounded Warriors" at the Jefferson Orleans North, 2600 Edenborn Ave., Metairie. The proceeds will be used to help five veterans of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The evening of fun will feature music by the American Legion Post 175 Band and the Jerry Embree Swing Band. There will be dancing exhibitions showcasing dancers from beginners to national champions. Everyone will have an opportunity to hit the dance floor after the exhibitions.

The fundraiser will help American Legion Post 377 expand their wounded warrior project, which they initiated last year with one honoree. Post Commander Michael Martin was excited about the prospect of being able to help five local veterans this year.

"Their sacrifice was made when they were called away from their families, which was a hardship to everyone. They suffered both physical and mental injuries as a result of their service," Martin said. This is the reason that his post gives gifts to not only the veterans, but also to their family members.

USA Dance, Inc. is a nonprofit corporation made up of more than 160 chapters nationwide that serves as the representative organization for social and recreational ballroom and Latin dancers in America. Members enjoy and promote ballroom dancing, such as the waltz, fox trot, tango and rumba for all ages, ranging from preschoolers to seniors.

The Gumbo Chapter encompasses the area that includes the greater New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Houma areas. The club's past philanthropic efforts have included dance training for home school students, funding and training local youth for national competition, sponsoring ballroom dancing clubs at local schools, promoting dance at local nursing homes and other projects.

Traditionally, the club has held a dance exhibition at a local mall to recognize National Ballroom Dance Week, which this year takes place from Sept. 19 through Sept. 28. Board member Diana Lovell, Kerry Lovell's wife, said they want to spread the word about the sport.

"Ballroom dancing is a good social outlet and we hope that more people can get involved to get the benefits of ballroom dancing," Diana Lovell said.

Tickets cost \$20 a person and can be purchased in advance or at the door. The price of admission includes heavy hors d'oeuvres, and there will be a cash bar. For information or to purchase tickets, call 504.607.1041 or 225.324.9830. The club website is www.usadancegumbo.org.

Donations can be mailed to USA Dance LA Gumbo Chapter 5031, Wounded Warrior Fundraiser, P.O. Box 7021, Metairie, LA 70010-7021.