

Cornerstone students study up on dancing

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BLOOMINGTON -- Instead of doing calculus Wednesday, Megan Belgrave was on her feet counting "four, five, six" as she learned new dance steps.

"I'm probably better at calculus than dancing," the senior at Cornerstone Christian Academy joked.

She and the 50 other high school students at the academy learned new steps to prepare for their homecoming banquet and dance on Saturday at Doubletree Hotel and Conference Center.

This is the second year in which the school has provided dance lessons for its students for homecoming, and the program has been very popular, said Beth Sondgeroth, academic dean at the school.

The dance lessons are required for one period a day for the week before homecoming. Some students who weren't planning to go to the homecoming dance at the beginning of the lessons on Monday changed their minds after a few lessons, she said.

Students starting looking more confident and smiling as teachers Sam and Judy Wright helped them get in step. The Wrights operate Wright Way Dance Studio in Mahomet.

"When I'm teaching, I see the enthusiasm on their faces," said Sam Wright, noting that the students' smiles just motivate him more. He has taught 3,000 students to dance in the past three months.

As part of the homecoming events this week, students were attired in colors reflected their classes. Freshmen wore red, sophomores stripes, juniors polka dots, and seniors white.

After 31 years as a teacher and coach at Urbana High School, Wright "retired" to devote much of his time to dancing and teaching dance. He and his wife are competitive dancers today, having two



Cornerstone Christian Academy sophomore Johanna Bielby, right, works with a dance partner Monday, Oct. 23, 2006. (Pantagraph/STEVE SMEDLEY)



Cornerstone Christian Academy senior Megan Belgrave works with sophomore Dexter Dotson, while learning triple swing moves as part of a ballroom dancing lesson Monday, Oct. 23, 2006. (Pantagraph/STEVE SMEDLEY)

national second-place titles.

Wright, who taught subjects ranging from math and geography to self-defense, said male students seem to enjoy dancing when the instructor is male.

"He does such a good job of training the guys to be leaders," Sondgeroth said.

Instead of the students having to choose partners, they form two lines — boys and girls — and switch partners when Wright calls "rotate." That helps avoid the nervousness and discomfort of finding partners, Sondgeroth said.

It also provided a chance for all high school students to mingle with each other.

"Maybe it's the first time some seniors and freshman were face to face," Sondgeroth said. "It breaks down barriers and builds community."

Some students are naturally better dancers, so switching partners gives everyone a chance to improve.

"You are doing awfully well," Wright told students Wednesday as they learned some swing steps to go along with the homecoming dance's theme, "Rock Around the Clock."

The students are set to learn to waltz today.

"We're learning different stuff this year than we did last year," said Belgrave.

"It was a lot of fun and we got better," said Mitchell Song, a junior.

They had to learn to dance in less time this year because Friday, the day that normally would be the final day for lessons, will be spent on the students' quarterly service project. They will help with fall cleanup at Little Galilee Christian Assembly in Clinton.

The students help at food banks, children's foundations and other organizations on their service days, Sondgeroth said.

An extra dance lesson was offered Saturday for the outside teens who will be attending the dance as dates of Cornerstone students. Only one couple attended this year, so they got a special lesson, Wright said.



Cornerstone Christian Academy students watch the husband and wife dance instructor team of Sam and Judy Wright, owners of Wright Way Dance Studios, Mahomet, on Monday, Oct. 23, 2006. (Pantagraph/STEVE SMEDLEY)



Fifty one students at Cornerstone Christian Academy dance on the gym floor during a dance class Monday, Oct. 23, 2006. The students are taking part in dance classes as part of preparations for the Homecoming Dance this Saturday. The theme is Rock Around the Clock. (Pantagraph/STEVE SMEDLEY)

Other schools have shown interest in the dance lessons, Sondgeroth said. Last year she received e-mails from parents of students from Lexington, Tri-Valley and Olympia high school wanting to know more about the program.

"It's nice to have the opportunity to learn to dance now and get the benefit later," Belgrave said.

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