

Crash-course in dancing has Tahoe-ites ready for the stage

By Kathryn Reed

Smiles are scarce. Concentration levels are at their peak. Counting to four keeps being repeated. Bodies are being twisted in ways they aren't used to moving.

Today will be the last of four practice sessions for the six South Shore residents who will take the stage March 1 with professional dancers as their partners. Dancing with Your Stars is a take-off of the wildly successful "Dancing with the Stars" television show.



Six Tahoe-ites will perform with professionals March 1 in Dancing with Your Stars. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Wendy David has a perplexed look as she asks Andrew Blackburn, "What are we doing now?"

The Lake Tahoe Unified School District board member is paired with a tall partner. She stretches to put her arm around Blackburn's neck. As Tuesday's rehearsal progresses, she is

bending and turning with more ease.

Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority Executive Director Carol Chaplin quips, "The fact someone can flip me ... I'm thrilled."

Chaplin and Joey Williams are taking up a good portion of the width of the multipurpose room at Sierra House Elementary School as they work on a two-step.

The guy from Tahoe, Curtis Fong, is more stationary in his area of the room. At one point it looks like he is proposing to Sarah Najdek, but then she tells him he's supposed to be facing the "audience" and not her.

Joel Damerall, South Tahoe High teacher, doesn't seem to be having fun until near the end of the second day. By then he is spinning Jen Hayes like they have been dancing together for weeks and not just hours.

Bert's Café owner Bueno Ketelsen is like a matador as he spins a black and red cape to the beat of the music. A smile crosses his face when partner Casey Bartlemay tells him he got it.

The sixth local competitor is Deb Howard, but she missed Tuesday's session.

"We prefer when they don't have a ton of training. Then it's like a fresh canvas for us," Jesse Maher, assistant director for the Utah Ballroom Dance Company, tells *Lake Tahoe News*.

Just like the TV show, video and interviews are being shot during the rehearsals that will be played during the performance. And just like the TV show, the contestants will be all decked out in fancy clothes and makeup.

Each duo will perform one dance routine. Each is a different type of dance like the Waltz or jitterbug. During the intermission the audience will pick their favorite. That score will be combined with the judges' (Marcia Sarosik, Pat Ronan and Paul Middlebrook) score to crown the winner.

The second half of the show is all about the professionals, of which there are about 20 who will be on the stage.

The money raised goes to Tahoe Arts Project, the local organization that brings performing arts to South Shore schools. (One program was cut this year because donations to TAP have dwindled.) The six dancers who have been practicing with locals all week have also been working with students all week.

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Note:

- Dancing with Your Stars – March 1, 7pm
- MontBleu casino in Stateline
- Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children.

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