

If It's Not Country, Rock Or Jazz, It Must Be Meant For Shagging

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

An interesting mix of people hovered around the pool outside the Laketree Shores clubhouse near Ocean Isle Beach on a Saturday night in July.

There were young couples, others with silver hair and some of all ages who were mingling solo through the crowd, all dressed casually, most in shorts.

Inside, a lavish spread of snacks and a well-stocked bar kept everyone moving. They ate from paper plates, engaged in lively chatter, and laughed a lot.

Then the rhythmic sound of music bounced out into the early night air. Joe Gupton had set up his complex sound system, along with hundreds of tapes, 45 rpm records and compact discs. His voice boomed into the microphone as he cajoled the eaters to become dancers.

Gradually they did, returning to their favorite hobby, the reason they were here. Soon, dozens of couples were swinging partners out to the side, twirling them, stepping sharply to the beat, dipping and gliding, having fun.

It was the Society of Brunswick Shaggers enjoying their monthly meeting, with about 40 members and guests prepared to dance the night away.

"We started this group about a year ago," explained Rosie Scarborough, whose husband Jack is treasurer. "There were about 25 of us who used to dance at Meeting Street in Resort Plaza in Shallotte. They had a juke box with good beach music on it and encouraged dancing. Joe Gupton would come and play music for us, too, and the owners of the place offered shag lessons. When the place closed, we didn't want to have to go to Myrtle Beach to shag, so we decided to have a shag club."

Scarborough, who said she's



STAFF PHOTO BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

SOCIETY OF BRUNSWICK SHAGGERS members demonstrate their prowess on the makeshift dance floor surrounding the Laketree Shores clubhouse pool.

shagged all her life, found it hard to describe the dance. "It came out of the old-style jitterbugging," she said, "but it's smooth and has an up tempo blues beat, not too fast. It appeals to those who grew up in the 50s and it's good exercise. I enjoy it." She acknowledged, however, that "it's hard for some people to learn if they don't have rhythm and can't count or remember steps."

The proper music for shagging is rhythm and blues, according to

these experts, not country, rock or jazz. The dancers at Laketree Shores had favorites like "Lady Soul", "Alligator Walk," "Your Place Or Mine?" and "Soothe Me, Baby." For variation, Gupton occasionally called for a "line dance," one executed in straight lines with no partners. Specific steps must be learned for this, but they are simple and repetitive.

As the dance portion of the club's July meeting got underway,

Gupton made a special announcement. Calling Charles Smith, the club's first president, and Debbie Fox, to the dance area, he informed onlookers that the two had become engaged and would soon be married. There was enthusiastic applause and cheers. This group, like many organizations, takes as much pleasure in the social interaction as in the dancing.

"We make everyone feel welcome," Scarborough said. "Singles

are encouraged to join and nobody is pressured to dance, either. Some just like to come and be with the others and that's fine." Meetings are held monthly in various clubhouses and restaurants around the county.

The object of the Society of Brunswick Shaggers, however, is to preserve shagging. "It's not a fad," Scarborough insisted. "More and more young people are doing it and when they do, they're phenomenal. They do things we can't because they're so limber."

While the society is part of a state association and encouraged to enter state competitions, the Brunswick group has not yet done so. "Our club wants to be sure everyone has a chance to learn the steps first," Scarborough said, adding that weekly lessons have been provided by Mike Formyduval and Maxine and Leo Presley.

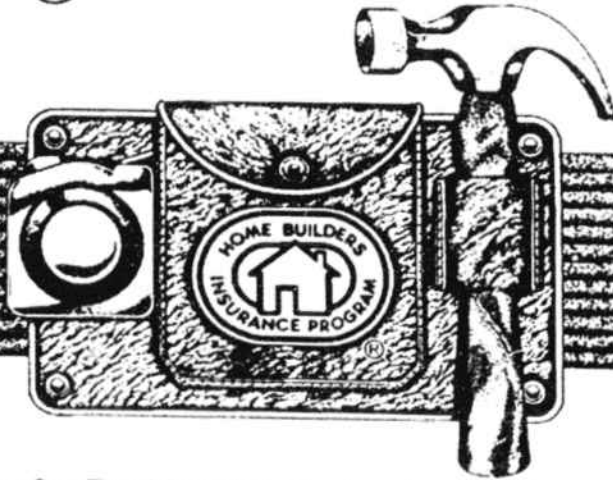
Gupton seemed to enjoy his disk jockey role, filling occasional requests, keeping a steady stream of varied tunes piped out to dancers and interspersing them with announcements and chatter.

"I don't get to dance much, myself," he said, "unless I put a really long tune on. But I like it. About four years ago, I asked my wife for shag lessons as a birthday gift and now I dance every chance I get."

Gupton said the shag began with dancers on the beach, swinging their partners across the sandy strand of North Myrtle Beach.

It has certainly infiltrated its northern neighbor. Ocean Isle Beach and perhaps all Brunswick County will soon step to the rhythms of "Alligator Walk" or line up for the "Electric Slide." If this year-old society continues to grow in numbers and enthusiasm, the shag will dominate the recreational scene.

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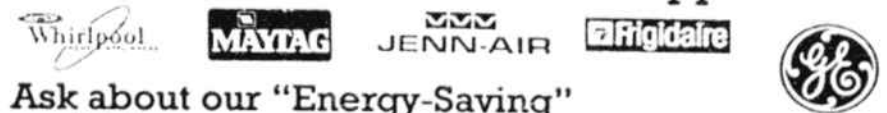
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