

## STEPPING OUT IN STYLE

# Senior Tappers Have Fun While Keeping Fit

BY SUSAN USHER

Spacing themselves in rows across Virginia Feaga's garage, the women stand erect in black tuxedo jackets and top hats, canes poised at their side.

When the music begins they swing into action, their faces a study in concentration.

It's a new routine the dancers are trying to polish in time to perform for a senior group that meets at the District II community building where they practice once a week.

"We're not going to have this perfect until the year 2000," quips Ms. Feaga as she executes a complicated series of steps, turns and kicks.

But the 75-year-old tap dancer is laughing, not complaining, and the others join in. Then they take it again, from the top, looking only slightly winded from their exertions.

It's hard to accept that the youngest member of the group is 55 and the oldest, 75. They move together easily and well, their confidence evident when executing a familiar routine.

Harry "Bubba" Grose and company have found a way to keep fit while having a lot of fun.

Twice a week, the small group of devotees gathers to tap and laugh away the tight muscles and stresses of another day. One session is class time with their chosen lead-

er, Harry "Bubba" Grose. One night a week they rehearse together in Ms. Feaga's roomy garage.

"It's good exercise for the body and the mind," says Marilyn Grose.

Tom and Lucille Lewis like kicking up their heels as well. They're working on a song and dance routine with Bubba for the show.

"It's all hambone and a lot of fun," says Tom as he dons a straw hat, picks up a wooden cane and steps into place.

And it's good for them. Says instructor "Bubba" Grose, "It's a lot better than jogging or working out."

While those in the troupe like to dance, only a few have had formal training—a year or two at most as children. That hasn't deterred them a bit—or says Grose—kept them from becoming quite good at what they do, a little bit at a time.

"He's taught us some really good routines," says Mary Zeifel. "He is very, very patient."

Their venture into tap dancing began in March 1990, though several members have joined since then. Several couples in a group that socializes together regularly persuaded Grose to teach them ballroom dancing. When the lessons ended, they wanted more, specifically, tap dance.

Absent this night are the "redhead" of the



STAFF PHOTOS BY SUSAN USHER

LET THE MUSIC BEGIN for dancers (front from left) Marilyn Grose and Lucille Lewis and (back) Mary Zeifel, Virginia Feaga and Mary Gillam, the newest member of the troupe.



STEPPING OUT TOGETHER are Tom and Lucille Lewis and Harry "Bubba" Grose.

troupe, Gerri Scharoun, and Pegge Jaynes. Considered the best dancer of the troupe, Pegge also writes material and choreographs numbers like the *Waltz Clog*, a routine in which troupe members don newsboy outfits and tap to "Daisy, Daisy."

Rehearsals are invigorating. While dancers may arrive dragging a little, they typically leave bright-spirited and peppy.

"Today I was worn out until I came and danced a little bit," admitted Grose.

The sessions remind Grose of his 35 years teaching dance to the lace-collared crowd in Charlotte before retiring in 1986

to the Holden Beach area. He also taught all along the East Coast with Carolina Dance Masters and Dance Masters of America. His children continue in the trade: Tammy teaches ballet in California and Gigi teaches dance in Charlotte, serving as choreographer for the Charlotte Hornets "Honey Bees." Danny is employed with Seigfried & Roy at The Mirage in Las Vegas while Harry O. Grose III teaches dance at a fitness center in Charlotte.

After teaching children all day, Grose taught classes at night for adults. Like these garage sessions with friends, those classes

were invigorating for him as well as for his students.

"I don't know how many times I would go to class dreading it, then at 10 o'clock at night still be ready to go," he recalled.

For Grose, teaching his friends to tap "has been more fun and exercise than work."

The same holds true for his unlikely group of students.

Says Ms. Feaga as the group makes plans to squeeze in an extra practice before their next show date, "It keeps me out of the doctor's office."

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