

Dancing with Santa Monica's stars

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What do Santa Monica Mayor Tony Vazquez, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Superintendent Sandra Lyon and Kaiser Permanente physician Dr. Gregorio Saccone have in common? They will all be lacing up their dancing shoes on May 22 to compete in the 1st annual Sand and Sea Ball at the Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel.

Inspired by the popular television hit, "Dancing with The Stars," the Sand and Sea Ball will incorporate six dancers – including Vazquez, Lyon and Saccone – from the Santa Monica-Malibu area, three celebrity judges and a celebrity emcee to raise funds to benefit the Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation (SMMEF) and support music and dance programs in Santa Monica-Malibu public schools.

"Our district is very well known for its music and arts programming and also known for theater as well, but not as well known for dance," executive director of SMMEF, Linda Greenberg, said. "In fifth grade we have a ballroom dancing program. And I've been told this program has really been transformative for students. They were all complaining and groaning and didn't want to participate at first. But even the ones that complained the loudest at first were more confident, were totally invested in the program and just really enjoyed the experience by the end. It was a good introduction to dance because they learn to be respectful to each other."

Greenberg said SMMEF wants to continue to fund the 5th grade program, but with its cost coming in at \$50,000 it won't be easy. That's why she was so excited to hear that the Arthur Murray Dance Center Santa Monica chose SMMEF's music and dance programs as the beneficiary for the Sand and Sea Ball.

And the mind behind fundraising for SMMEF? David Woodbury of Arthur Murray.

Over a year ago Woodbury went to the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce Christmas party at Loews and was standing in the mezzanine when he thought, what if they used that space for a dance competition to benefit children?

“I got chills,” Woodbury said. “It sounds very romantic but it’s true. ... And I realized I could do that, I can raise money for kids. It kinda changed my life in that moment.”

Woodbury then worked hard to get all the other pieces in place, including pulling in dancers like Lyon.

“Although dancing in front of a large group of people is not high on my list, I’m willing to overcome apprehension to do whatever is needed to support our students,” the superintendent said. “While I have zero dance experience, I am enjoying rehearsing and feel this is a great way to raise funds and spotlight our exceptional SMMEF-funded performing arts programs.”

At 5 p.m. on May 22 the Sand and Sea Ball will commence at Loews with cocktails and dinner, then the dancers will compete for the “Mirrored Ball.” The evening will end with social dancing and mixers led by Arthur Murray professionals.

Kaiser Permanente is serving as the title sponsor, with other sponsors including Downtown Santa Monica, the Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows, Santa Monica Place/Macerich, Santa Monica Travel & Tourism and Steve Little Insurance.

Two of the event’s judges are Nick Kosovich, the U.S. and world ballroom dance champion, and owner of Lenique Dancewear, and Christy Melgoza, the franchisee of the Woodland Hills and the Thousand Oaks Arthur Murray Dance Centers.

The emcee is Paul Hermanson, Franchisee of Santa Barbara Arthur Murray Dance Center.

For sponsorship opportunities and tickets, please go to www.SandandSeaBall.com.

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