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'Stars' lend fancy footwork to Preservation Worcester

By Nancy Sheehan TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF
nsheehan@telegram.com



Left, Worcester fire chief Gerard Dio dances with instructor Edna Stefaniak; right, Worcester Art Museum director Jim Welu dances with instructor Trish Camera. (T&G Staff Photos/JIM COLLINS)

'Dancing with the City 2'

When: 7 p.m. March 8 **Where:** Mechanics Hall, 321 Main St., Worcester **How much:** \$50 per person for balcony seats; \$75 per person for floor seats. Call Preservation Worcester to make reservations, (508) 754-8760

It's cha-cha time again.

Last year's "Dancing with the City" fundraiser for Preservation Worcester set toes tapping and hands clapping all over town. This year, a new slate of local celebrities has signed on for the event, which is modeled after the popular TV show "Dancing with the Stars." The competition will be held Saturday at Mechanics Hall.

Competitors this year will be: Karin Branscombe, vice president of Quaker Special Risk and a Preservation Worcester board member; Gerard Dio, the Worcester fire chief; Elaine Evans, a Realtor with W.B. Realty and another Preservation Worcester board member; Kevin O'Sullivan, president and CEO of Massachusetts Biomedical Initiatives; Jennifer Roy, news anchor/reporter for WCTR-TV3, and Jim Welu, Worcester Art Museum director.

There is a special connection between the event and its location, Deborah Packard, Preservation Worcester executive director, said. "It's going to be at Mechanics Hall this year, which is exciting not just because it's a beautiful spot, but because saving Mechanics Hall was how Preservation Worcester got started in 1969," she said.

It's also going to be held on a Saturday night instead of a Sunday, as it was last year. "I think this will be more fun because people will be more in the mood to stay and dance after the competition," Packard said.

This year's celebrities have been busy learning their routines — busier than they thought they would be.

"I clearly underestimated the time it takes to learn good dancing moves," Branscombe said. "It looks so simple, but is really very complicated." She feels the challenge is worth the effort, however. "I never thought dancing could be this much fun, and I certainly found a new hobby," she said.

"I don't think I've ever focused so much on the process of learning," Welu said.

"It's amazing what can result from a great teacher, a lot of practice and a deadline."

Dancing with the City 2 will include a cocktail reception with complimentary hors d'oeuvres; ballroom dance lessons provided by the staff of Poise, Style & Motion Dance Studio; individual spotlight dances by celebrities and their professional dance partners; a cha-cha dance-off with all celebrities and their partners dancing at once and a tango formation dance with 16 professionals and students from Poise, Style & Motion Dance Studio demonstrating that daring dance.

Last year's champs will return for spotlight dances.

Beata O'Brien, 2007's female winner, will perform disco dances with her fleet-footed husband, Worcester City Manager Michael O'Brien. Last year's male winner, world champion boxer Jose Antonio Rivera, will dance the cha-cha with professional dancer Edna Stefaniak.

Also dancing will be Trish Camera and Jared Vigneault, Eastern United States Dance Sport Rising Star Champions.

Andy Lacombe, sports anchor/reporter for WCTR-TV3, and Steve Montouri, professional dancer and owner of Poise, Style & Motion Dance Studio, will be masters of ceremony.

The event is a collaboration between Preservation Worcester, Dining Out MetroWest, the City of Worcester and Poise, Style & Motion Dance Studio, and benefits historic preservation in the city.

"I didn't know what to expect when I signed up to participate and dance in the event and I must admit that it has been a real challenge learning all of the ballroom dance techniques and routines," O'Sullivan said.

“However, it has been a really fun experience and certainly benefits a great cause. I can’t wait to take the floor.”