

# FUTURE ROMANTICS GET LESSON IN RESPECT, POLITENESS

Area youth attend Jon D. Williams Cotillion classes in Hiwan  
by Ann Elisabeth Addison

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*Cotillion: ko-til'-yen. noun.Fr.1. a lively dance originating in France in the 18<sup>th</sup> century 2. a quadrille 3. A formal ball at which girls are presented to society.*

According to the Jon D. Williams Cotillion program, another definition of cotillion is: "To assemble a group of young people to develop, respect, and appreciate their role in society through dance and social etiquette education."

That definition curtsied to life last Wednesday evening at the Evergreen Hiwan Golf Club, where boys and girls were, well ... civilized to each other.

Normally, the cotillion boys wear ties and suits and the girls party dresses or skirts and white gloves, but this night had a country western theme, so it was more relaxed. The clothes, that is, not the manners.

The boys and girls must first smile, shake hands, and say how-do-you-do's to the line of parental chaperones at the doors. Then the girls sit on one side of the room, and the boys on the other. Ward Sear, the director of the Jon D. Williams Cotillion program in Evergreen, played a cassette of waltz music.

"Gentlemen, ask the ladies to dance," he said.

The boys, hair slicked into place, cheeks shining, walked slowly but purposefully to the side where the girls sat with smiles on their faces. The boys bowed, hands extended: "May I have this dance?" they ask without a snicker.

Propriety is the name of the game at the Jon D. Williams Cotillion program. But high society and pretentiousness isn't, insisted Sear.

"This isn't about being rich and holding your little pinkie up and being a snob. It's about being considerate and having respect for other people."



*Director Ward Sear offering positioning tips*

Jon D. Williams Cotillion programs visit 36 different cities annually throughout the United States. Founded by Jon and Vivian Williams in 1949, it was established to bring back the traditional values of the past and translate them into the social demands of today. Through dance, music appreciation, and manner lessons, students in fourth through eighth grades develop confidence and socially redeeming habits.

"It's a nice way to relate to the opposite sex, too," said Karen Sawyer, a former cotillioner and co-chairwoman on the 1993 Evergreen Cotillion committee. "They do learn manners, but they have a lot of fun doing it."

Some younger folk who read this story might think, "Sure, sure, the parents may say that, but I bet the kids don't."

Ask the cotillion kids then:

Christopher Hubbard, a sixth-grader sporting a fancy fringed leather jacket, is a veteran cotillioner, having been to one in California last year. "I had fun at the last one, so my mom decided it would be good for me to go to this one, too. I just like dancing."

"I think it's fun to dance and learn the new steps," said fifth grader, Laura Melinkovich. "Now I know how to dance and have good manners."

Pressed a little bit more, she did say the politeness lessons are "just OK."

"It was my mom's idea for me to take this," she said. "She thought it would be good for me to learn manners."

Mom was sitting not too far away, with another chaperone, Dee Demont. They both were wearing party dresses and pretty gloves. Together, they decided Laura and Demont's son, Eric, could have fun together in the cotillion program.

"They're having a blast," said Demont. "Looking at some of these kids dancing who are so shy, cotillion has a lot to offer. When I see the excitement on their faces, I know it was a good idea."

Barbara Melinkovich agreed with her co-chaperone. "Normally, at junior high dances, the boys are on one side and the girls on the other, and they don't dance at all."

Well, at cotillion, they do. And here, no one will be turned down. It wouldn't be polite, for one thing. For another, there are exactly enough boys for every girl to have a dancing partner. And none of the boys have gross stuff on their hands (the girls wouldn't know anyway, since they have gloves on), nor do they step on the girls' toes, unless they're just learning a new dance.

This night, Sear is teaching them to perfect the jitterbug. Smiling, he goes from couple to couple, helping them with the steps.

Perhaps Sear gets such a kick from this because, having once been a self-professed "socially paralyzed" child, he didn't have the chance to dance.

"I was real uncomfortable around girls," said the handsome host. "But this gives kids a controlled, safe environment to be with the opposite sex." That's why Jim Oltmans - video camera on and focused on his son, James, who was dancing around the room with his partner - enrolled his son into the JDW Cotillion program. "I think it's important to know how to have social graces, not to be embarrassed or too shy in social situations."



### *Manners are of utmost importance....*

Barbara Melinkovich agreed, adding, "I don't think society teaches manners as well as it use to."

Manners are of utmost importance. The idea is that the Jon D. Williams Cotillion program will teach students enough manners and how to dance well enough that they'll feel comfortable in any social situation, "from a school social to the White House," quotes Jon D. Williams III, President of their national program. "These are skills that our students will have throughout their lifetimes. The first time, or the next time, that they have an interview -- they will be comfortable, confident, and know how to handle themselves." Besides proper dancing etiquette, boys learn how to pour punch for girls and how to seat them at a table. Girls and boys learn what silverware to use, when to say thank you and please, and how to listen.

Some students say they forget about their manners when they're in school, but not all. Hubbard, whose father and mother are also involved in cotillion, said his manners lessons "get into your mind and you keep using them in school, too."

He said he isn't shy, either.

"It's just a little bit easier now," said Hubbard of the normally frightening thought of asking a girl to dance.

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