

# A Southern Classic: Canton Cotillion classes start in January

By Jill Richstone | Posted: Wednesday, December 4, 2013 12:00 am

In an age of technology, where many young people learn to interact via text messages, emails and social media, there can be a lack of education on how to adequately and properly interact face-to-face with peers and adults. Jon D. Williams Cotillion, which is coming to Canton to teach two courses this January, desires to educate children on social skills, proper etiquette, manners and dance.

“There is definitely a need for social skills, especially in today’s society when most children are consumed by electronics and they no longer know how to communicate with one another, or how to address adults,” said Maggie Long, executive director of marketing with Jon D. Williams Education Programs. “There is definitely a tangible advantage that you can gain in today’s competitive society when you understand the basic necessities of social skills.”

The program consists of five weeks of classes, beginning on Jan. 21, and will be held on Tuesday evenings at the Northside Hospital-Cherokee Conference Center. There are two classes being offered, one for children in third and fourth grade and the other for children in fifth and sixth grade.

The class for third and fourth graders will take place from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m., while the class for fifth and sixth graders will take place from 6:15 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. The cost for each course comes to about \$36 per hour — \$180 total for the class for younger students and \$225 total for the class for older students.

Each session the students will be taught something new. Long said the children are taught how to start a conversation, how to make a good first impression and how to be courteous. They also are taught about dress and appearance and verbal and nonverbal skills.

Long said that in this age of technology, the company saw the need for children also to be educated on technology etiquette, such as rules of emails and texting and when they are appropriate or not.

“One of our primary things that we teach is dining etiquette. We walk them through basically how you would eat an entire meal. From an RSVP all the way to the thank-you note at the end of the evening,” Long said.

She said the classes use games and activities to teach children, but “the primary tool we use to teach these skills is actually ballroom dance.”

“It creates a fun environment where we play pop music, classical music, contemporary music, music from around the world, all different genres of music. We teach everything from the meringue, the foxtrot, waltz, salsa, swing, hustle, line dances and a ton more,” Long said. “The reason why we use dance is because dance really breaks down inhibitions between a young gentleman and a young lady and it teaches them physical respect, it also teaches them confidence, so we ask that the gentlemen, and the ladies, chose partners throughout the evening.”

Long said that when young people are put in a situation where they have to ask a partner to dance it gets them out of their “comfort zone,” while in a safe environment where everybody has to say “yes” and everyone always has a partner.

“It gives them an opportunity to interact with the opposite gender in a safe and educationally focused environment,” she said.

Equal opportunity between men and women is a core value that is taught during cotillion classes, and Long said the young men and women will trade off who hosts the evening each week. One week, the young men will host the evening where they serve the ladies punch and ask the ladies to dance, then, the next week, the ladies will host the evening.

“We strongly believe that this is an equal opportunity world, and we empower the young ladies just as much as we empower the young men in our classrooms, because we believe that they have the opportunity to be the leaders of the world just like the gentlemen do,” Long said.

At the end of the five weeks, there is a “final party,” where parents are invited and the children are given the opportunity to dance with their parents and teach them about making a good first impression and how to start a conversation.

“We get the parents and the children interacting with one another in a big room and it’s a lot of fun,” she said.

Long said she believes the skills taught during cotillion are important because they are not taught in school anymore and while parents may try to teach these skills to their children at home, sometimes it takes outside reinforcement. Cotillion classes give children an environment to practice those skills.

“Stanford, Harvard and the Carnegie Institute did separate studies, so three different studies, but they all came to a similar conclusion that over 85 percent of getting a job, keeping a job and being promoted in a job are due solely to your social skills,” Long said.

For more information, or to register, visit [www.cotillion.com](http://www.cotillion.com). Classes are open to all students and Long encourages people to register prior to Jan. 1 to ensure their spot.