

# The McAllen Monitor

## COTILLION.. what will it do for your future?



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Trevor Rowland stood at the doorway of the McAllen Country

Club ballroom looking a bit nervous. He fiddled with his necktie and shuffled his feet forward toward the Cotillion receiving line not knowing what to expect. Surrounding him were about 50 other teenagers, some just as tense, trying hard to stall. Within that bunch there were those who had been through this routine before it seemed.

They knew exactly what to do: Shake hands, introduce themselves, look the person straight in the eye and move toward the center of the ballroom. Approaching the receiving line, Rowland looked left and right and extended his hand. If all goes according to plan, today's social education lesson will boost the 14-year-old's ability to face unnerving situations head on.

JDWC Inc, a 60-year program teaching social etiquette and dance to children ages 10 to 15, travels around the country teaching young people ways to improve socialization skills. This includes: *The Purpose of Manners, How to Introduce Yourself, The Art of Conversation* and *Making a Positive First Impression*, among many more.

Sounds like serious business for growing teenagers who might not consider spending

an hour and a half in a ballroom wildly entertaining. But a lot of the young men and women in this year's class are retuning students, some who have been attending McAllen Cotillion for the past five years. **"It really builds confidence and teaches you how to carry yourself in public or at events. It's also a lot of fun and a great way to meet new people."** said Ashton Todd, 14. This year marks Todd's fifth year with the program, and the McAllen Memorial freshman says she learns something new each time. Standing tall and poised she said, **"I used to be really shy, but now I know how to talk to people at any time."** Her close friend, Courtney Hall, whom Todd met through the program, looks forward to this time of year when classes begin. **"Cotillion gives you confidence so you don't feel awkward all the time,"** said the McAllen Memorial cheerleader. **"Basically, it's so you won't make a fool of yourself in public."**



Cotillion is not a charm school and a far cry from the charm schools once acquainted with the term, "cotillion." Under the direction of the Jon D. Williams Cotillions organization, the five-session, once-a-month course gives young men and women a chance to have fun while learning common courtesies.

**“A lot of you may be thinking, ‘What in the world have my parents gotten me into now?’ But this is probably the most important class you’ll take in your life.”**



“It’s important to know how to interact with other people and understand the value of a positive first impression. We will teach the gentlemen how not to speak grunt,” Mason joked. “And we’ll teach the importance of a good, firm hand shake.”

Not a high-five.

Not even a fingertip shake.

Around the room, these sprouting young adults wore double-breasted suits, elegant party dresses for the young ladies - some even topped the attire with spotless white gloves.

Johnathan Weisfeld-Hinojosa, 15, looked sharp as a tack when it came time to foxtrot.

“Right together, side step... left together, side step... slow and quick, quick...slow and quick, quick,”

Ms. Mason called through a microphone.

Weisfeld-Hinojosa concentrated on each step, occasionally glancing at his feet to keep up with the music.

Like some of the others, this will be the McAllen High School freshman’s last session. His mother, Rosalie, looked on with content. “They learn a lot,” she said quietly.

Cotillion instructors work with about 10,000 students annually, Mason said, and with every session, some teenagers wonder how learning to jitterbug will affect their life in the future.

**“Dancing is a tool to teach powerful social messages,” she said.  
“The interaction it provides give students the opportunity to learn how to address partners, make someone feel comfortable, introduce light conversation and show respect to one another.”**

