

Published August 29th, 2012

## Belly Dancing for Fun and Fitness

By Sophie Braccini



Dawn Morrison guides a group of women during Ladies' Night Out at her Shimmy Dreams Studio. Photo Sophie Braccini

The vibe was light and festive in Samira Dawn's studio last Friday night, as Ladies' Night Out unfolded. Samira Dawn (Dawn Morrison), in glamorous belly dance attire, got the 15 or so women who came that night to loosen up and start having fun while learning the first techniques of belly dancing. Giggling, dancing, expressing their inner sensuality, the women had a blast in the non-judgmental and supportive atmosphere of the new studio Morrison opened at the beginning of August in Lafayette.

"We left our husbands and kids at home and we came to just have fun among us girls," said Wendy Hershey, who after hearing about Shimmy Dreams Studio had invited six friends to join her for the night. The ladies in the room that night ranged in age from their 30s to mid-60s; two or three were dancers who had worked with different techniques and some had not exercised in a while. "Belly dancing is for women of all ages and sizes," said Morrison. "You can dance and feel beautiful at whatever stage of your life you're in."

Morrison's story with belly dancing is a bit unusual. When in school, she trained as a synchronized swimmer with the Walnut Creek Aquanauts. She was on the U.S. National Team and reached a pre-Olympic level before an injured shoulder crushed her dreams. Shortly after ending

her swimming career she was dazzled by a group of belly dancers at a party. "I was drawn to the artistry, sensuality and confidence with which they performed," said Morrison. "But what really left me in awe was that each woman who enchanted me was unique. They were real women of every age, shape, size, color, and ability. And each one radiated with confidence, sensuality, and beauty."

Morrison immediately started taking classes and receiving private coaching, and now the mother of two young children has been belly dancing professionally for 14 years. She was the co-director of Dansoleil Belly Dance Studio in Brentwood several years ago and has performed regularly at eight different restaurants in the East Bay.

Opening the studio in Lafayette is a new and exciting step for her. She teaches different levels of belly dance, a class for pre-teens, cardio belly dance for those who want the extra work-out, and she organizes Ladies' Night Out.

During Ladies' Night Out, after sharing food and drinks and seeing Samira Dawn perform a short program, the ladies draped hip scarves and coin belts, removed their shoes and started following the teacher's instructions.

Guided by the lustful rhythm of Oriental music, they twirled, shook, did the belly roll, the Egyptian hip movement, adding arm actions, soft body waves, creating a dance, sometimes a bit clumsy - most were beginners - but always with good humor. As the night progressed, the women started to let their bodies guide them, and began to express their inner grace.

"The focus of the studio is to encourage, motivate, and build women's self-esteem," said Morrison. "I am also a fitness professional who teaches exercise classes at four local gyms. So I will be helping women realize their fitness and health goals as well as showing them, through belly dance, how beautiful they really are."

Shimmy Dreams Belly Dance Studio is located at 1018 Almanor Lane, off Mt. Diablo Blvd. in Lafayette. For information, call (925) 984-8213 or visit [www.shimmydreams.com](http://www.shimmydreams.com).

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