

Carolina

LIVING *people & places*

Life's a Dance

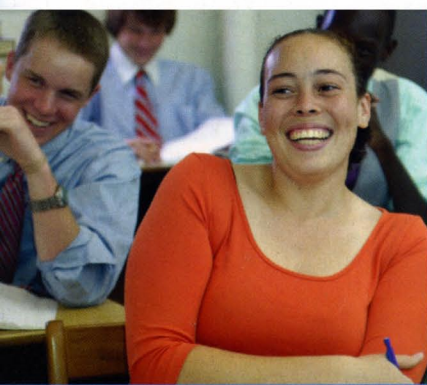
A Kinston woman shapes
lives through cotillion.

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Life's a Dance

*A writer revisits her childhood cotillion and
reunites with a teacher who's still going strong.*

It began in the fall of seventh grade. One Saturday evening a month, our parents would take turns collecting my group of girlfriends from the safety of our homes and dropping us off at the local church gymnasium. There we would stand cheek to cheek with our most anticipated and unnerving event of the month: Carolina Junior Cotillion. Under the leadership of Mrs. Cherry, who cheerily sang out steps as we sashayed our way through everything from the waltz to the shag, we would stand in a big circle (girls on the inside, boys facing us on the outside) and rotate partners, awkwardly dancing with every seventh-grade boy in the room.

Happy Feet

Long before I took my first dance step, Ann Cherry of Kinston started molding the manners and grace of middle schoolers. Now teaching her second generation, Mrs. Cherry has become a legend among eastern North Carolina youth. Every year, more than 600 students—in fifth through eighth grades—greet her with a strong handshake and a “Hello, Mrs. Cherry. My name is...” For one night a month, it's a little dancing, a little etiquette instruction, and a whole lot of growing up.

However, now that I am all grown up, I still can't seem to make myself call her “Ann.”

Mrs. Cherry believes we need cotillion now more than ever.

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“I want young people to become comfortable with dancing so they'll love it the rest of their lives.”

Ann Cherry

We would never have admitted it, but by the time the Spring Ball (Cotillion's last hurrah) rolled around, my friends and I had all come to enjoy spending our Saturday nights in the church gym. We even

secretly looked forward to the slow dances. Now, as a 26-year-old, I go to my fair share of weddings, and every time the band cranks up I'm grateful for Mrs. Cherry. I haven't gained much grace since

the seventh grade (and surrounding toes should beware), but I have a lot of fun. And that's what it's all about. **ROBIN SUTTON**

For more information: Visit www.carolinacotillion.com.

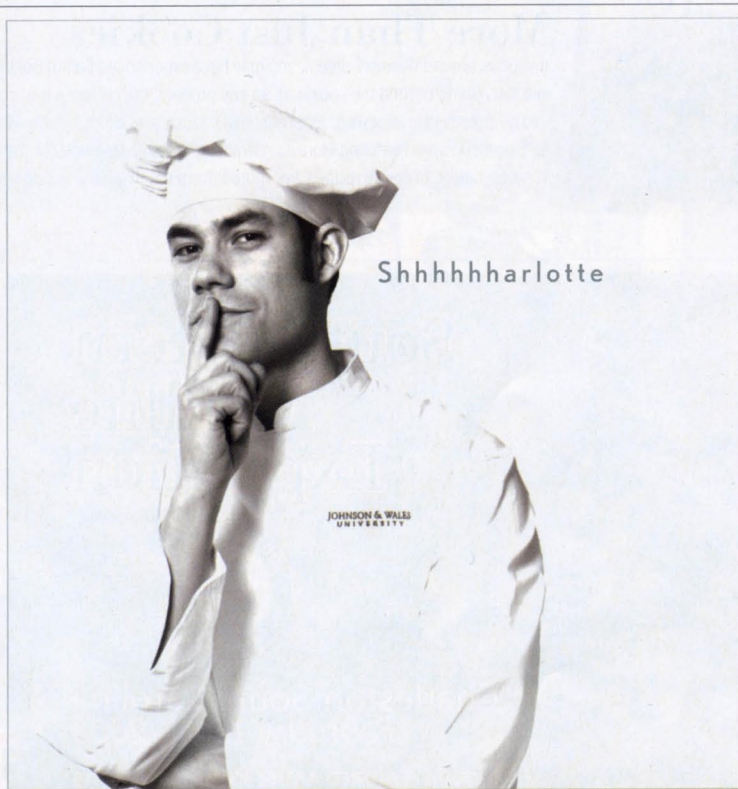
LEFT: With Ann Cherry on the stage, cotillion is anything but a stuffy experience. ABOVE: “Dance is my vehicle, but that's not all I'm teaching,” Ann says. “These are skills my students will carry with them throughout life.”

“There are so many passive entertainment options for kids today, and children need to get up off the couch,” she says. “Dance is active and energetic. It's almost like a team sport, but on another level.”

Take It With You

“I think a real fear that adults have is dancing. If they have not had the opportunity to break through with that in their youth, then I don't think they ever do it as adults,” Mrs. Cherry says. “I want young people to become comfortable with dancing so they'll love it the rest of their lives.”

“I hear parents say over and over again, ‘I made my child go to cotillion, but now he or she wants to continue,’” Mrs. Cherry notes.



Shhhhhharlotte



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