

RUSSELL & JOAN AMES

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'There's nothing to it'

Joan and Russell Ames get a real kick out of dancing up a storm

CLARISE KLASSEN
Herald-Tribune staff

Russell and Joan Ames are always "in the mood" for a foxtrot.

It's the favorite dance of this Grande Prairie couple after more than 50 years of cutting a rug.

"If anyone plays 'In the Mood' for us in the foxtrot, we're at it," said Russell, 70.

That dance may be their favorite, but it didn't win them their silver medals at the Canada Seniors Games in Medicine Hat in August.

Up against seven other couples, the Ames performed the compulsory old-fashioned waltz and then two optional choices — the California schottische and their own variation on the Boston two-step.

But despite their many years of dancing together, the Grande Prairie couple lost the gold medal to an unmarried couple from Saskatchewan. This was the first time dancing has been added to the national seniors games and only the second time the national seniors games have been held.

The Ames were quite pleased to be chosen to represent Alberta at the games. Their silvers add to the 12 medals the couple has already accumulated from Alberta games since 1986.

There has only been one provincial games in which Russell and Joan didn't bring home a medal since they first entered the 1986 games' dancing competition.

Russell and Joan keep strictly to the old-time dances — the waltz, one-step, Boston two-step,



Joan and Russell Ames are proven performers on the dance floor.

French minuet, polka and, of course, the fox trot, to name a few.

"I can't get him to jive. He won't do it," said Joan, quietly resigned.

"I just felt like I was all feet and I didn't feel comfortable," Russell replied in a tone which indicated the pair had had this discussion since they were teens in Bezanson.

"We met in school out there so we've been dancing for 54 years and we never had lessons," Russell says.

But just because Russell won't jive doesn't mean he or Joan aren't willing to try new things.

"I just bought a bike here a year ago," Russell said.

He now cycles to the Golden Age Centre every morning, weather permitting. He and Joan got

involved with the centre about 15 years ago and Russell is quite active at the executive level.

Russell used to join Joan on her daily walks until he developed arthritis in his toe. That's when he discovered cycling. While the Ames were at the Alberta Seniors Games in Three Hills in July demonstrating dance, Russell entered the predicted cycling event and won a silver.

Joan has been walking daily since 1984. Both golf in the summer and in the winter Russell curls while Joan has taken up floor curling.

Dancing is not for the weak. Besides the obvious need for rhythm, "you've got to be in good shape," Joan said.

"You've got have good legs, good feet," her husband added.

The couple said young people who come out to the seniors centre with their older relatives to the twice monthly dances, are amazed at their stamina.

"They can't believe how these old people can go. There's nothing to it — just get up and go," Russell said.

"We start at 8 o'clock and go until 10 steady and then we break for lunch," Joan said. "I don't get tired. I hardly know what that word means."

There are two couples in their 80s who regularly attend the social dances.

"They never miss a dance," Joan said.

Russell and Joan, born only nine days apart, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary Nov. 3. The couple has two children, both of whom live in Grande Prairie, and five grandchildren. None of them dance.

"I'm afraid it's going to phase out if the younger ones don't get into it," Russell said.

But that won't stop the Ames from getting "in the mood" for dancing whenever the band plays their song.

"We don't even think about it — we just get up and go," Russell says.