

## BUSINESS

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# New dance studio open in Fernandina Beach

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News-Leader

If you want to glide across the floor, jump and jive or do a spicy salsa, a new dance studio is open on Amelia Island to teach you to do so in style.

Gia Viselli DanceSport opened this week at 1891 S. Eighth St. in Fernandina Beach, a 2,200-square-foot space that is one of the largest in Florida.

Gia Zaritze Birtviseli (Gia Viselli) opened the studio after a long journey from the Eastern European country of Georgia, where he started dancing at age 4.

He is an international educator of the World Dance Council in Europe and a member of the National Dance Council of America. He taught dance in Tbilisi, Georgia, then came to the U.S. seven years ago, teaching in Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maine before coming to Florida.

He said Georgia has a warm climate and he missed that weather, so that attracted him to Florida. He learned about Amelia Island from his student, Barbara Birmingham, who is now his business consultant.

Ending up on Amelia Island as a dance instructor was not a straight line from Tbilisi to Fernandina Beach.

"In life there are U-turns," Viselli said. "First, I was a dancer, then did martial arts, then went back to dancing. I decided that dancing with beautiful ladies was better than beating up my friends and breaking noses. There is more pleasure in dancing than in beating."

Professional, competitive ballroom dancing is physically demanding, much like martial arts, he said, but it is a friendly competi-



SUBMITTED PHOTO  
Viselli with his student, Christina Amoroso Beringer, as they danced at the Kings Ball Competition in New Jersey December.



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Gia Viselli outside his dance studio on Eighth Street. The studio is open noon-9 p.m. Monday through Friday, but students can make appointments, outside business hours or on weekends if needed.

tion, and one he enjoys.

"We travel in dancing competitions. Sometimes, you will dance 110 times in a competition, which can be four or six days," Viselli said. "If you are ready, it's not exhausting. It's not just competition. It's enjoyment. It's fun. You're not going there, like, oh I have to beat you. Everyone is meeting each other. Everyone is happy. It is a happy competition, not like martial arts. We are meeting each other, see where people are competing, and go to see each other. You meet people that you will see once or twice, or 25 times a year."

The studio offers instruction for beginners through advanced students in DanceSport

programs and creates customized choreography for weddings. Viselli also prepares dancers for competition at the regional or national level.

The studio offers a number of American and international styles of dance, including ballroom (waltz, tango, foxtrot, quickstep) and Latin (salsa, bachata, samba, cha-cha-cha and mambo).

For women who want to learn about dance, one-hour ladies Latin jam dance lessons will be available from 6-7 p.m. on Thursdays. Drop-ins are welcome at \$10 per person.

"Lively Latin music makes us all eager to move," Viselli said. "In each session, I will introduce students to steps from salsa, bachata, cha-cha-cha and samba."

While the sessions are for ladies only, movements from the lessons can easily be transferred to dancing as part of a couple later.

The open space of the studio is ideal for those who have been home for the last year and want to have fun in a safe environment.

"The pandemic has been hard on people," Viselli said. "With enhanced cleaning procedures, lots of space and now vaccine availability, I hope to offer people a fun way to feel happy and healthy."

"Dance and be happy" is the motto at Gia Viselli DanceSport, and Viselli is a living example that dance can indeed make someone happy.

"It is a pleasure — pleasure to teach, a pleasure to dance and, for me, it's never work," he said. "I have the best job in the world. If what you want and what you do are the same, you have the best job in the world."

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