

High Profile

Name: Michael Solomon

Age: 82

Claim to fame: Dayton dance organizer

Occasionally, people who hear about the Michael Solomon Pavilion speculate on the nature of the person for whom it is named. Some have assumed he was a local millionaire who donated the pavilion to Dayton.

Mike Solomon has heard reports of such speculation, and it gives him a chuckle. Solomon, no millionaire, has been memorialized in his own time for his contributions to dancing in Dayton.

A native of Beirut, Lebanon, who has lived in Dayton since infancy, Solomon was a Dayton parks and recreation department employee for 35 years. He joined the staff as a clerical worker in 1929 and became involved in athletic programs "sort of through the back door," having clerical responsibilities for city sports leagues. Later, he became director of special activities.

HIS INTEREST in dance developed in 1947 when some new neighbors from California, Bill and Miriam Robinson, introduced him to a number of international dances. "They were looking for a place to dance. I said, maybe we can arrange something, but why don't you show me what you do?"

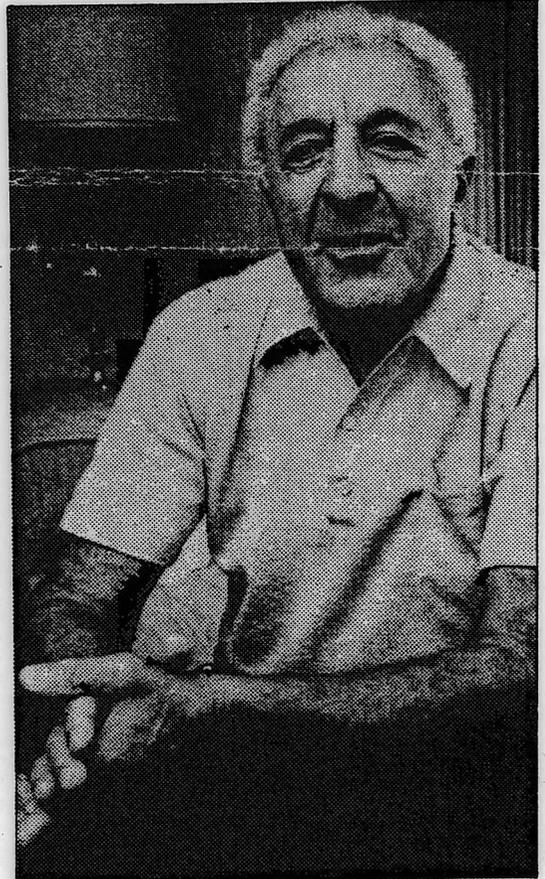
Solomon said the Robinsons and some other friends danced for him and his wife Margaret in the living room of their West Norman Avenue home. The dancing fascinated him; not only did he fit dancing into the schedules at recreation centers, he began learning — and teaching — dancing himself. "We did all forms of dancing, from ballroom dancing to round dancing." Square dancing also quickly became popular.

Interest in dancing grew; at the end of 1950, the Dayton Square Dance Club was formed. But the dances and classes had to compete with other events for space, and Solomon looked for a permanent location. The dancers got exclusive use of an aging pavilion, the remaining structure from a country club complex that had burned, at the Community Golf Course.

"NOT MUCH WORK had been done by the city to keep the building up. It remained a real pavilion, which meant it was open to the elements. It could be used only in the summer months," he recalled.

"We prevailed upon the (parks and recreation) department to enclose it . . . but still not much else was done in remodeling. The floor at one time had been painted to protect it from the elements — that was a dreadful thing to have done to a dance floor!" he said.

Solomon taught all kinds of dancing, including square dance calling and leadership. Well-known instructors and leaders from around the country were brought in to give dance workshops. As clubs sprang up, Solomon formed the Miami Valley Dance Council as a coordinating body.



Michael Solomon sits this one out

The pavilion still little attention, and at one point the department considered demolishing it. But in 1964, the Miami Valley Dance Council petitioned the city to renovate the building. "That happened to coincide with the year I was planning to retire," Solomon said, so the council proposed that the revamped pavilion be named after him.

SOLOMON SAID he "was pleased, of course," at the honor, but he joked that later he had second thoughts about it. Believing that he owned and operated the pavilion himself, he said, "People would call me to complain about it. They'd say, *your floor's too slippery. Your restroom isn't clean.*"

Solomon is proud of his involvement with the pavilion. As for the idea that he gave the pavilion to the city, he said, "If I were a millionaire I'd donate half a dozen of them. It's a wonderful facility. It's used to capacity."

He no longer dances, but Solomon remains interested in dancing. He has watched break-dancing, but asked if he would have taught it in his younger years, he replied, with a laugh: "My God, no."

*By Tim Gaffney
Staff writer*