

Miami Valley Folk Dancers mark 50 years of fun

By TERRY MORRIS
Dayton Daily News

The cardboard shamrocks and leprechaun hats of St. Patrick's Day were still strung overhead last month when a varied group, including recent Chinese immigrants Janifer Tsou and Lina Considine, joined in a spirited Israeli dance called *Al Gamali*.

International harmony may have its ups and downs elsewhere, but it can be found every Thursday on the dance floor of the Michael Solomon Pavilion in Kettering, where local residents of many heritages do international folk dances.

Thursday has been the Miami Valley Folk Dancers' regular night at the pavilion for longer than most current members of the club can remember.

One of the oldest such groups in the region, Miami Valley Folk Dancers celebrated its 50th anniversary March 29-30 with workshops in Scottish and Balkan dances and a party attended by more than 100, including co-founder Grace Wolff.

"It can be challenging. There must be 1,000 dances you can learn," said Tsou, who joined in 2001. "Every time I learn a new one, I consider it an accomplishment."

Each Thursday night dance is organized by one or more of the members, who get to choose which dances will be done and in what order. Some time is always set aside for requests.

A chalkboard near the sound system, which was being operated by club president Harry Khamis, bore appeals for the *Legmal Dana* (Macedonian), *Well Hall* (English) and *Horehronsky Czardas* (Slovakia). There are three categories: Line, couple and set dances.

Visitors and prospective new members are welcome.



RON ALVEY/DAYTON DAILY NEWS

GRACE WOLFF (center), 91, arrives at the Michael Solomon Pavilion for the Miami Valley Folk Dancers' 50th anniversary celebration. She helped organize the group in 1952. She is escorted by Lee Moser (left) and Gitta Reck.

"Some come in once and we never see them again," said club historian Leslie Hyll, 43, a member for more than 30 years who met and later married her husband, Ed Cordray, at the Solomon Pavilion. Others return occasionally, and some rarely miss a dance.

Khamis, 51, a professor of mathematics and statistics who directs Wright State University's Statistical Consulting Center, was already hooked on

international folk dance when he came to Dayton from Blackshear, Va., in 1980.

"When I walked into the pavilion, my vision was of a sea of white heads. I thought I probably wouldn't be dancing there very much. But I've been going to the club virtually every Thursday since," he said.

Membership dipped into the low 20s in the late 1960s and '70s, "but now we're up to 90 members," Hyll said.

Each session begins with an orientation class for beginners from 7 to 8 p.m. Programmed dancing is from 8 to 9 and 9:30 to 10, with more advanced teaching from 9 to 9:30. It isn't necessary to bring a partner.

Anyone who participates in 12 sessions is eligible to become a member. Dues are \$30 a year. Admission for nonmembers is \$1.50. Ten cents of every dollar goes for maintenance of the pavilion, which is owned by the city of Dayton but maintained by the Miami Valley Dance Council.

The pavilion is named for the late Michael Solomon, a native of Beirut, Lebanon, who directed special activities for the city recreation department and co-founded the folk-dancing club in December 1952.

For some members including Tsou and Considine, who said men don't dance with women in the Chinese culture, the group has provided new experiences. For others, it's the essence of familiarity.

"We dropped out for a while when our kids were young," said longtime member Carolyn Stovall. "When we came back, nothing had changed."

For more information about the Miami Valley Folk Dancers, go to www.geocities.com/mvfolkdancers or call Stovall at 427-2120; Hyll, 252-0638, or John Pappas, 427-2453. The Solomon Pavilion is at 2917 Berkley St., next to the Community Golf Course.

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