

Is salsa good for senior Latinos?

S. CHICAGO | Class gets them moving, checks impact on fitness

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The ingredients are there: sexy Latin music, moves to match, even a bit of leg.

Except that most of the leg you see is below the knee, terminating with feet encased in sensible lace-up shoes, not stiletto heels.

"Don't forget to work that hip in there — pop!" dance instructor Miguel Mendez urges the group of nine students as they practice "Bachata" salsa moves inside the sweltering Villa Guadalupe Senior Services Center in South Chicago.

The students range in age from 55 to 73, they're all Latino and — until they began taking Mendez's class about two months ago — largely inactive.

Now, they are part of a University of Illinois at Chicago study that's aiming to assess whether a little salsa instruction might improve overall health, giving a boost to everything from fitness to brain function, for older Hispanic women and men, who, as a group, tend to get little exercise.

David X. Marquez, a professor of kinesiology and nutrition, says the lack of exercise is a chronic problem among America's growing population of older Latinos, many of whom once, when they were young, loved to dance but drifted away from it as they got older.

Theresa Beas, 69, is one of the volunteers. She's a widow who loves to dance, but not by herself.

"I really enjoy this," says Beas. "It gives me the chance to come out and socialize, dance and learn a few steps — or, should I say, a lot of steps."

There's very little scien-



Instructor Miguel Mendez works with Consuelo Arteaga on her salsa moves at the Villa Guadalupe center. | BRIAN JACKSON/SUN-TIMES

tific data about how dancing affects those 55 and older — perhaps, Marquez says, because researchers have viewed dance as being too unstructured to study. He suspects dancing is an even better physical activity than brisk walking because students must learn new and increasingly more complicated steps as the classes progress.

Marquez's project allows him to measure his students' ability to concentrate and their short-term memory at the start and at the end of the three-month project. Each student is also hooked up to a

heart monitor and asked to keep a written "dance log" to gauge their mood during the twice-weekly classes.

Though the results aren't in yet, Marquez says he's encouraged by what he sees — students who, despite learning a wide range of new steps, have stuck with it and are clearly enjoying it.

"There is nothing about the biology of Latinos that means it would only work with this group of people," Marquez says. "It could work with many older adults."

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Gov hands out over \$500 mil. for transit projects

Standing at the 63rd and Ashland "L" station, Gov. Quinn announced Thursday more than \$500 million in spending on mass transit

projects throughout Illinois.

Quinn gave \$442 million to the RTA, which will pass \$253 million to the CTA; \$157 million to Metra and \$32 million to PACE. Transit systems outside of the Chicago area will receive \$58 million.

As Quinn spoke, a handful of hecklers held up a "Dump

Quinn in 2010" banner.

The money will help transit agencies smooth out slow zones and replace unreliable railroad cars, elevated and subway cars, engines, locomotives, buses, vans, tracks, stations, platforms and other facilities.

Abdon M. Pallasch



NEIL STEINBERG
is on vacation.