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Zumba making its way west

By Shaila O'Hara, Staff writer
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Eclectic tunes with dance-inducing rhythms and Latin vibes explode from a room that bursts with shaking, jumping and laughing men and women. Fun and levity are rarely synonymous with aerobic workouts, but for Zumba enthusiasts, exercise becomes a festive weekly event.

Oak Point Center is hosting Zumba classes, aerobics incorporating dances to different styles of Latin and international music. Andrea Stewart, instructor and personal trainer, will be teaching the classes from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays.

Stewart said Zumba began in Florida when an instructor, a Columbian native, forgot his music for class and so created a workout incorporating assorted dances to random CDs from his car. Combining meringue, reggaeton and various other dancing styles into a 50- to 60-minute workout, the class usually helps people burn between 500 and 800 calories, Stewart said.

"It's very popular in Florida and the East Coast and it's kind of like it's migrating this way," she said.

She said she has received an enthusiastic reaction; all her classes have filled up, with participants ranging from teenagers to senior citizens.

"The initial reaction is, 'I didn't expect to sweat so much.' Then they just keep thinking it's fun; a great way to work out," Stewart said. "It's kind of like you focus so much on the music that you're not thinking about, 'Oh, they're killing me.'"

Stewart, who also teaches belly-dancing classes, likes to focus her workouts on music and dancing. Experience is not a requirement to attend the class, since participants learn during the sessions.

"I love to dance and I like to use my dance background in my workouts. Once people come to the classes they usually get hooked. You learn how to dance from doing it," she said.

The class is \$45 for five weeks. For more information about Zumba Fitness Class at Oak Point Center, call 972-941-7250 or visit www.planoparks.org.

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