



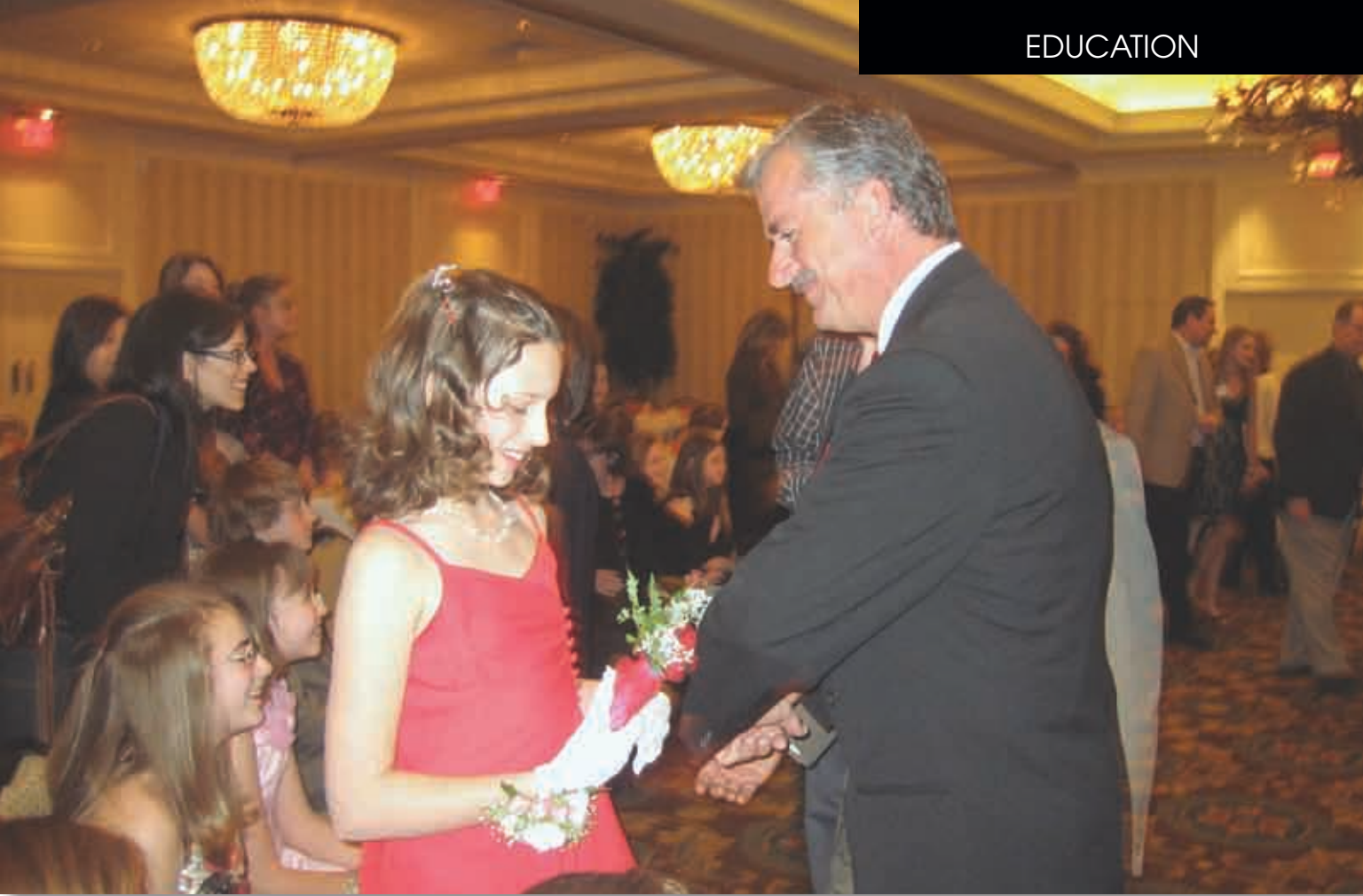
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*End of season Cotillion Ball*

*photos provided by Shannon Babovec*

## May I Have This Dance?

By Penny Martin

BETWEEN THE AGES of eleven and fifteen, life can be awkward, to say the least. Too old to be considered a kid, too young to be seen as an adult, it's hard knowing where you belong. Most young teens find comfort among a circle of their closest friends. Here they feel safe, surrounded by peers facing the same uncomfortable situations.

As parents, we worry about where our child is seeking refuge. We do our best to teach them how to behave properly; how to be polite and respectful to others, but are our children associating with others who believe in these same values?

What if there were a program where your child could be among their peers learning the skills necessary to help get them through this awkward stage of their life? A program that reinforces the values you want your child to learn and

builds the self-confidence essential to helping them become happy, successful adults. Wouldn't a program such as this be worth the cost of tuition? Well, there is such a program, and it's called "Cotillion."

What is Cotillion? It was originally the name of a dance popular in the 1700s that was performed in the royal courts; however, the term has evolved to have a much broader meaning today. This program builds self-confidence and character and helps set boundaries of behavior.

Self-confidence is a very important component of a child's development. Unfortunately, peer influence becomes so important to our children. By practicing their social skills in a peer setting, the message becomes clear that their peers openly accept proper behavior.

Character education used to be taught more in our school systems; however, changes over the years have caused the schools to spend less time on this aspect of child development. That is why a program like the National League of Junior Cotillions can be so valuable. It is important for young teens to understand that how they act is not just a reflection of their character, but demonstrates their level of education and their ability to be a leader.

In many social situations children are not prepared; they are not clear on the boundaries of appropriate social behavior, especially between boys and girls. Junior Cotillion helps them understand how to interact with one another properly and these boundaries help keep them healthy and safe throughout their lives.

“Some people believe that basic rules of etiquette, simple acts of kindness and consideration for others, are becoming a thing of the past,” says Shannon Babovec, director of the National League of Junior Cotillions (NLJC), Frisco and Plano Chapters. Phrases like “Please” and “Thank You” are becoming scarce these days. “This is the main reason people are being drawn back to cotillion programs. The mission of the National League of Junior Cotillions is to learn to treat others with honor, dignity and respect for better relationships with family, friends and associates.

National League of Junior Cotillions has 450 chapters in over 30 states. The programs offered begin with Pre-Cotillion, which include kindergarten age children through 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Junior Cotillion includes 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. High School Cotillion Club consists of 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students.

NLJC is America’s premier etiquette and social dance program because leading educators and dance masters from across the nation have developed their curriculum. Their Directors are carefully selected and trained. Each chapter responds to the needs in their local community and is required to maintain only the highest standards set by the national organization.

“I know there is a little apprehension in many of the students at first,” Ms. Babovec explains. “These kids show up, look around the room and see 50 or 60 other kids their age and realize they are all in this together. They also realize their parents aren’t the only ones who talk about how important it is to have good manners. They actually come to enjoy the classes – as evidenced by their smiles and laughter.”

“Manners matter,” says Kellee Scott. Ms. Scott enrolled her 11-year-old daughter, Hadley, in the 2006 program. “Hadley wasn’t thrilled at first to be attending the program. She thought it would be boring. But, after her first class she jumped in the car and said she loved it.” Hadley attends 6<sup>th</sup> grade at Staley Middle School in Frisco. Ms. Scott learned about the program from a friend and was immediately interested in having her daughter attend. “At some point in her life all eyes will be on Hadley. I want her to be prepared,” adds Ms. Scott.



“Cotillion is worth every penny of the tuition. Shannon teaches the kids in such a fun and interesting way and they learn so much. Hadley even planned a five-course dinner party for the family over the holidays. She did the place settings, name cards, helped plan the menus and assisted everyone at the table on passing the food to one another in the proper way. The family thoroughly enjoyed themselves. We will certainly sign Hadley up for her second year of cotillion.”

The program consists of seven events. Five regular classes that last an hour and a half where time is spent learning various etiquette topics and basic ballroom dance steps. The sixth event is an instructional dinner. The final event, the Grand Spring Ball, is semi-formal. The Ball also includes special prizes, contests, party favors, corsages and boutonnieres. Parents are also invited to attend the last half hour of this event to watch and dance with their children.

The program curriculum breaks down into the introduction and four practice dances; end of summer, autumn, winter and Valentine’s dances. These are classes with hands-on etiquette and dance training. The three-course instructional dinner begins with a tutorial dinner focusing on table manners including proper use of napkins, utensils, silverware positions and more. Students are guided with individual attention and instruction as each course is presented. The Grand Ball allows students a formal environment

to practice all their skills and enjoy the self-assurance that comes from knowing the proper manners to use.

To make the dance instruction more enjoyable for everyone, NLJC uses the popular music kids are listening to today. Students learn the basic dance steps in a very non-threatening way, moving within a dance circle while rotating partners. By the end of the class, they will have danced with everyone, alleviating much of their anxiety. Young adults can be silly, even disrespectful, because they are not comfortable in their surroundings or with each other. Junior Cotillion teaches them not only how to dance, but how to treat each other properly in a social atmosphere.

All students participate in roll play when learning etiquette skills. “By getting the students involved they retain the information as opposed to just sitting and listening to lectures,” Ms. Babovec states.

As a sign of the times we are living in, lessons on electronic etiquette are part of the curriculum. Everything from cell phone courtesies to phone and e-mail manners are covered in the program. Sometimes referred to as ‘Netiquette,’ special instructions are given explaining the rules associated with the use of web surfing and instant messaging.

Booklets on etiquette are handed out after the first class. Students are assigned a ‘Cotillion Challenge’ each month. This allows them to practice the skills they have learned and the booklets are a great reference for the many topics covered during the season.

Ms. Babovec, along with all National League of Junior Cotillion Directors, is licensed and extensively trained in presenting this comprehensive program. The Plano Chapter of Junior Cotillion has been in place for eleven years. It is well established having over 200 students in the 2006 program and 2007-08 will be the fourth year for the Frisco Chapter of the National League of Junior Cotillions. There were 80 students enrolled in the Frisco Chapter in 2006, and the program is growing every year. The program does not openly advertise its services but depends instead on word of mouth and parent recommendations for its growth each year.

Each season an advisory board

comprised of parents with students in the respective age groups recommends students they feel would be interested in the program. Invitations to join Junior Cotillion are sent in late March to all who are recommended and registration begins in April.

A reception for parents is held each April at Stonebriar Country Club in Frisco. Parents are invited to come and familiarize themselves with the program. The parent reception kicks off registration for the upcoming year. The National League of Junior Cotillions the invitation process is not meant to be exclusive. If a parent or potential student is interested in participating, they are more than welcome to join.

"I see big changes in the students from the first class of the season to the end of the year at the Grand Spring Ball," Ms. Babovic points out. "The biggest change is in their confidence and self-esteem. Middle school years are awkward. So much more is expected of the students

when they reach this age. They are thrown into more social interactions. The skills they learn in Junior Cotillion are invaluable tools they will take with them the rest of their lives." Having a firm handshake, making eye contact and speaking in a clear, concise tone will be precious assets to our youngsters further down the road.

National League of Junior Cotillion Chapters also participate in cultural and community service events such as baking cookies for hospitals and nursing homes, book collecting for non-profit organizations, donations to charity foundations, sending letters and cards to our military overseas, canned food drives for the holidays and much more. Junior Cotillion students learn to unselfishly donate their time to others. This community participation will help them become great community leaders.

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