



Louise Howe MBA '06, with dancing partner, José Flores, and other dance enthusiasts at Alisa's House of Salsa in New Haven.

# Dance Fever

From salsa to cha-cha,  
more adults are giving ballroom a whirl

BY LEEANNE GRIFFIN

**B**y day, Louise Howe MBA '06 is director of marketing communications for admissions at Quinnipiac. At night, she dons a flouncy dress and heels and tears up the dance floor with partner José Flores, whirling and gyrating to an irresistible salsa beat.

For the past two years, Howe has studied Latin dance at Alisa's House of Salsa in New Haven, Conn., learning and rehearsing the intricate steps of salsa, merengue and bachata. On the weekends, she and Flores head to Latin dance clubs to show off their moves.

"It's so much fun, and it's painless exercise," she said.

Howe is not alone. As dance fever sweeps the nation, thanks to television shows like *So You Think You Can Dance* and two consecutive seasons of *Dancing with the Stars*, many are discovering a newfound appreciation for creative movement. This is good news for Quinnipiac alumni who have turned their passions for dance into their livelihoods.

Michelle (Cretella) Soliwoda '96, MBA '99, a longtime dancer, left a corporate job she hated to open her own studio, Back Stage Dance Center in Killingworth, Conn. Now in her eighth year of business, she couldn't be happier with her decision.

"Professor [Frank] Bellizzi told us we should combine our degrees with something we love," she said. "That's the best advice I ever could have received."

Back Stage offers classes in tap, ballet, jazz, pointe, lyrical, modern, acrobatics and hip-hop. Soliwoda has seen many new students inspired

by the growing popularity of TV dance shows. "Unfortunately, the TV dancers make it look so easy," she said. "It's more of a challenge when they're learning for the first time, but they really enjoy it."

Christine Grafer '03, a former Quinnipiac Dance Company president, opened Dance Expression of Westchester in Peekskill, N.Y., in 2004 with her sister Jessica. The studio offers traditional tap, ballet and jazz classes, along with adult ballroom dancing.

"Ballroom enrollment definitely has picked up since *Dancing with the Stars*, she said. "When they watch it on TV, it looks fun to them, and they want to try it."

A dancer from the age of 6, Grafer has danced with the New Jersey Nets, taken classes in Manhattan and performed in many off-Broadway musicals since graduation. She said her choreography experience with the QU Dance Company helped her discover a love for teaching.

"It's great to be on the other end, seeing young girls looking up to me—it's kind of inspiring," she said.

Grafer thinks dance is beneficial for students of any age or experience level. "It builds self-esteem and discipline," she said. "It's just a fun, healthy activity."

Howe can attest to this. "Dancing is a great way to keep in shape in terms of cardio exercise, not to mention strength and muscle tone, and my posture's improved—I've gained height!"

Though the dance craze may be fleeting, Howe is not stopping anytime soon. "I'll just keep dancing as long as my body can take it," she said.