



Tambil Chmielinski

## Belly Dancing – Good for Your Body and Spirit!

By Mary Brotherton

If the idea of belly dancing brings forth images of "Lawrence of Arabia," sheiks, sultans and young harem girls dancing to strange sounding music, you aren't alone. You might be mistaken, but you won't be the only one. Today, many belly dancers in Brevard County are grandmothers, and some have attributed belly dancing to moving them from their wheelchairs.

In 1983 Americans were introduced to petite Little Egypt, who brought belly dancing to America's World's Fair. For decades, this folk dance was misunderstood and was labeled as exotic and erotic. While the dance can be both, it was initially created by women who danced for other women to celebrate the feminine spirit.

Tambil Chmielinski brought the art of Turkish belly dancing to the area when she and her husband moved here to do."

Tambil believes that she was given a natural talent for healing through the art of her dance. She founded the nonprofit American Belly Dance Club, which now has more than 80 members. Many of her former students are now teachers: her oldest student is 76 years old. When Tambil saw the reaction of a stroke victim to her dance and saw the life in her eyes, she knew she had been destined to work with other seniors.

"Belly dancing is good for relaxation and coordination. It's a kind of emotional and physical therapy. It's sensual, not sexual, and it's so much fun!"

Knowing how the dance has helped her own aging body, Tambil insists the only thing preventing her from performing somersaults is a slight touch of bursitis. She doesn't believe that age, weight or physical limitations should ever prevent anyone from studying the centuries-old art form.

"Belly dancing challenges your awareness of your body. You learn to accept your body no matter what shape or age it is; it makes you more confident."

Those who watched or were included in her performance at One Senior Place can attest to Tambil's limitless energy. Seniors who had never belly danced before were gyrating, shaking and undulating to

more years ago than she will admit.

"We retired to Florida because of my arthritis, but I think I'm still shaking pretty good," she said to a standing room crowd assembled at One Senior Place in Viera.

Preferring to be called simply Tambil, she's as fiery and fun as she is flexible; and she's a senior citizen. Tambil studied classical ballet in her hometown at the Istanbul Conservatory. At the age of 13, she performed belly dancing for a charitable event. A year later, her classical training had paved the way for a lucrative career performing her native folk dance internationally.

Once in America, she performed with notable musicians such as Benny Goodman, Harry James, Frank Sinatra and Lou Monte. She has also made numerous appearances on the Merv Griffin Show.

"But it was here, in Melbourne, where I started doing what I was born the cheers of their friends.

"Belly dancing will help you develop strong arms, good posture, strong legs and flexibility through your torso," said Tambil, as she demonstrated the easy movements she will teach at One Senior Place as part of Brevard Community College's Leisure and Fun Class program.

For two Mondays in March, One Senior Place will become a belly dance studio. Tambil will teach seniors, even those with limited mobility, how to use their bodies to heal themselves.

"Belly dancing, aside from its more obvious delights, is better for you than slimnastics, more pleasant than massage, healthier than a sauna and teaches self-discipline. As an exercise, it is thoroughly invigorating, delightfully sensuous and a wonderful figure builder. It also keeps your stiffening joints moving and is a natural pain killer."

Seniors interested in learning to "Belly Dance with Tambil" must pre-register for the \$20 class by calling (321) 433-7530 or online at [www.bcctraining.com](http://www.bcctraining.com). If you cannot attend the class in Viera on Mondays, Tambil will also be teaching on Thursday evenings at the BCC Melbourne Campus.