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Stepping up to the challenge



By Nancy Acton

With Belco CEO reputation as a dancer apparently cemented in the public mind thanks to his natty footwork in a company commercial, he felt he had a reputation to defend when invited to be a competitor in the National Dance Foundation of Bermuda's "Dancing with the Stars" segment of tomorrow night's gala.

In fact, so seriously has Mr. Madeiros taken his invitation that, like some of his fellow competitors, he flew to New York for some intense practice with his professional instructor, Betina Hershey.

"I know the other guys are taking it seriously, so I must be competitive," he says.

Not that Mr. Madeiros is a stranger to dancing. He and his wife Julie have always loved to dance socially, and their repertoire includes the waltz and jitterbug; now they will be adding the merengue to the list.

This is a quick Latin dance which requires flexibility, and was chosen for him by his dance instructor after the briefest of auditions.

"It must be the Latin look I have — that Portuguese background," he laughs.

Initially beset by illness and a back problem, the Belco chief has been diligently making up for lost time, with his wife as the resident partner.

"We have been practising at home twice a day for an hour," he says. "It is hard work, but I have my reputation at stake, and I am taking it very seriously."

Mr. Madeiros describes his training as "a lot of fun", and says he has been very impressed with how light on their feet the professional instructors are.

"They are like little feathers, they just float," CEO of corporate management at the Butterfield Bank, spends a lot of time travelling, which has limited his opportunities to practise — but not his dedication to the cause.

Speaking earlier this week from California, he said: "I am not sure I'm going to be the star of the show, but I am going to give it my best shot. That is all I can do. They sent us all to dance boot camp for six hours at first, and we have been trying to work with (the instructors) ever since. I was due to go to New York last week to rehearse, but the weather was too bad, so I will be flying back the day before the gala and we have a dress rehearsal that night."

Meanwhile, like his fellow contestants, Mr. Thompson "who will be doing the foxtrot as his showpiece" was given a video tape and music, and he also wrote down his routine, so he knows what to do.

"I think all of us are taking it fairly seriously because, first of all we have been having fun, and second, we don't want to embarrass ourselves. None of us are professional dancers, but we'll give it our best shot," he says.

As a man whose dancing skills hark back to the rock 'n' roll era, and with no formal training behind him, the busy bank executive says that when Mr. Kramer called and asked him to participate, "he laid it all out, and guaranteed he would not embarrass us", so on that basis, Mr. Thompson accepted because he would be doing his bit for a very good cause.

Minister of Social Rehabilitation rarely dances in Bermuda because he "likes to dance in less critical and restrictive circumstances. Here you have to be so precise on the dance floor you can't really enjoy yourself". So when Mr. Kramer invited him to participate he says he was "shocked".

Nevertheless, having supported the National Dance Foundation of Bermuda at its previous galas, Mr. Butler was happy to do so again, so he accepted on condition that he would be the first to dance. Meanwhile, he has been practising the tango with professional instructor "Miss Betina" in New York, whom he describes as "excellent, and very patient".

In addition, because he promised Mr. Kramer he would give "100 percent", the Minister has also be taking private lessons here with Angela Hayward of Sabor School of Dance.

"I started out with two left feet and the worst posture, and I found it to be a real challenge," he says. "It is organised, and you are doing a choreographed piece, which I had never done, so I took extra lessons."

Knowing that he will be among many people at the gala whom he does not know, and that all eyes will be upon him, Mr. Butler has also invested in tango tapes and music, and is determined to look his best.

Even so, the man who bristles with confidence in the political arena confesses that, because this is something so different, he is experiencing "a little trepidation", and is actually looking forward to when his "long 90 seconds" are over. Yet he is also philosophical.

"I have put my heart and soul into it, and whether I fall flat on my face or not I will be giving 100 percent," Mr. Butler assures.

Bank of Bermuda CEO Brian O'Hara has always loved to dance, and grew up enjoying the popular steps of the 50s and 60s, but this is his first experience of the rumba, and formal training, and it has been a revelation.

It looks easy on television, but it has been an eye-opener how hard the work is, he says. It is not easy to be graceful and do well. There are so many things you have to concentrate on, and also look like you are enjoying it. Putting all that together has taken a lot of practice, but I am really enthusiastic about learning a new life skill. I have often thought about it, but never had the opportunity. This has forced me into something new and different, and the more I learn the more I like it.

So much so, in fact, that the reinsurance executive says he would like to continue learning new dances.

Recalling Mr. Kramer's initial approach, Mr. O'Hara said he thought it was for the usual donation something which happens all the time in the corporate world. Instead, he was flabbergasted to be invited to not only chair the gala but also dance.

It took my breath away, he confesses. My heart stopped beating for a little while. It scared the heck out of me, but then I thought, What the heck it will force me to learn something new and different, and it will be fun.

And so it has proved. Like the other contestants, Mr. O'Hara has been practising regularly to perfect his moves and overall performance, with his wife as a helpful partner. Looking ahead to the gala, Mr. O'Hara admits it will be a little daunting, but he hopes that the work he has put in will pay off.

The deep immersion in ballroom dancing was infectious.

Shadow Minister of Works and Engineering, and Sport was absolutely delighted to be invited as a competitor, not only because he really enjoys dancing but also because he is always pleased to support any organisation or foundation which does positive things.

When Don asked me I was really enthusiastic about wanting to do it because I believe in what the National Dance Foundation is doing, and I thought it would be a really great opportunity to show my skills and help the organisation out, he says.

Mr. Brunson will be dancing the waltz a first for the man who has been a break dancer and is into salsa.

The waltz is a very disciplined, far more technical dance form, but I was certainly up for the challenge so I agreed to do it.

He even enjoyed the initial dance boot camp, and has been practising assiduously ever since, using a DVD of the dance as his frame of reference, and to understand exactly what he is supposed to be doing.

The Shadow Minister's professional instructor is Eva Carozza, whom he describes as excellent.

To learn the waltz is a discipline which she has made that much easier. I have learned a lot and thoroughly enjoyed it.

In fact, the legendary ballroom dance will now become a part of his personal repertoire.

The waltz is a beautiful, graceful dance, which has a nice flow. Very classical, clean movements, a nice dance discipline. I hope to do it justice.

So is Mr. Brunson apprehensive about his 90 seconds in the spotlight?

I am always nervous, but that s what helps to keep you sharp.
