

At 71, Jan Weakley is a walking endorsement for the benefits of dance, in particular a dance known as the Carolina Shag.

"Shag dancing is my life," she said enthusiastically one recent Wednesday afternoon that found her packing for a week-long trip to Myrtle Beach, S.C., to "do nothing but shag dancing."

As chairman of the Virginia Beach Shag Club's Junior Shag Committee, Weakley hopes to recruit a new generation of shaggers by offering weekly lessons to children ages 8 to 18 starting Monday night at Chester's Upper Deck at the Oceanfront.

"Juniors are the future of shag dancing," said Weakley, who's been a member of the Virginia Beach Shag Club since 1985 and has taught juniors on and off for about 12 years at various locations.

According to her, kids catch on to the basic six-count shag step pretty quickly.

"Once you learn the basic (step) and get it how it's supposed to be, you can learn many steps after that," she said.

The key is to get the kids moving as quickly as she can, and with recommendations from a young protege, she's selected music "that kids like and can dance to," Weakley said.

"I can shag to anything."

The free, one-hour junior shag lessons start at 6:30 p.m. Chester's Upper Deck is at 206 16th St. Call 425-1147 for information. Visit www.vbshagclub.com to learn more about the Virginia Beach Shag Club.

What do you love most about Carolina shag dancing? Mostly the friendships I have made while traveling up and down the East Coast going to workshops, parties and attending meetings for the Association of Carolina Shag Clubs. Also, a big plus has been taking my own grandchildren to Junior SOS (Society of Stranders), and even one of my adult sons has come to love the dance.

What is most challenging about teaching young people how to shag dance? The challenge is getting the children to lessons. They have so many other things to keep them busy, like sports



BILL TIERNAN | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Jan Weakley

This retired office manager lives to dance, especially the Carolina Shag, and to teach others how to step up their life game.

INTERVIEW BY VICTORIA BOURNE | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

and school.

What do you hope to accomplish by offering free weekly junior shag dance lessons? Hopefully, to teach them how to shag dance, enjoy the music and develop their confidence. Lots of social skills are learned through dance.

Describe Virginia Beach Shag Club members in two words: Friendly and fun

What do you love most about beach

music? Most of all you can understand the words, plus you can dance to a lot of blues music; it's slow and smooth – no bouncing when you shag dance. The downbeat is strong and regular, so it is easy to follow and keep in step with your partner.

If a snapshot was taken of you enjoying a perfect day, what would it look like? I'd be surrounded by my family and friends, and everyone would be healthy

and happy. Beach music would be playing in the background, and I'd have my dance shoes on waiting for the next dance.

Favorite gadget: My computer

Favorite movies: Any movie with Richard Gere in it

Pet peeve: I don't like liars.

Comfort food: New York bagels and pizza

TV shows you never miss: "Dancing With the Stars," "So You Think You Can Dance," "The Office" and ice-skating competitions

Of what achievements are you most proud? In 1990 I was inducted into the Virginia Shaggers Hall of Fame; in 2003, I was inducted into the National Living Legends of Dance and received the Icon Award from the Association of Carolina Shag Clubs and Society of Stranders.

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Bio

Full name Janice Weakley

Neighborhood One mile from the Oceanfront

Hometown Born and raised in Newark, N.J., but I've lived in Virginia Beach so long I feel like a Southern girl now.

Age 71

Nickname Jan

Marital status Divorced

Children David Gibboney, Darrell Gibboney, Dwayne Gibboney, Dawn Maturi and Bill Weakley. I also have eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Former Occupation Retired office manager (21 years) for the International Association of Bridge, Structural and Ornamental Ironworkers Local Union #79 in Norfolk

Education High school graduate

Community service I volunteer at the Sandler Center for the Performing Arts.

Church affiliation Christian

Hobbies Dancing, teaching shag dancing and line dancing, and traveling to other shag club weekend parties to dance some more. It keeps me young.

Personal motto Dancers don't stop dancing when they get old. Dancers grow old when they stop dancing.