

## Zumba sweeps Soquel dance studio

**BY JONDI GUMZ**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

The doors are open. The parking lot is full. And the hypnotic beat of the music carries across the street. What would fill up the Santa Cruz Dance Co. studio at 10 a.m.?

Zumba!

Did you see the Grammys in February? Shakira, with her midriff bare, shaking her hips.

Or imagine Ricky Martin doing a shimmy and shaking his booty.

Inside the dance studio in front of a full-length mirror, Joy Smith — voted the county's best dance instructor — is sweating her way through an energetic set of hip swivels and salsa steps. More than 30 women, and one man, are following her every move — swiveling, stepping and shaking — to a primal beat.

When the music stops, they applaud. When the class ends, they rave.

"I'm so happy in class," said Deo Robbins, 59, of Soquel, a grandmother who comes several times a week. "I feel joyful"

Susan Karon, 54, of Santa Cruz, calls it "a one to two water bottle" workout. "That Latin music has a way of releasing you," she said.

Santa Cruz resident John Perez, the only man at this session, came to class wearing a black tank top saying "Born to Zumba" Retired from the Metro transit district, he's lost more than 10 pounds since July because of Zumba.

"It's so much fun, you don't realize you're exercising," he said, as he headed to San Jose to give a Zumba demonstration.

Perez shares the same last name as the founder of Zumba, a fitness instructor in Colombia. Alberto Perez tells the story that he forgot the music tape for his aerobics class and improvised with the salsa and merengue tapes he had in his car.

From such humble beginnings an empire is formed. The Zumba Web site claims 2.5 million DVDs sold in more than 30 countries and classes in 3,000 dance studios.

Perez brought Zumba to Miami eight years ago and then leveraged partnerships with Kellogg's cereal company and music producer Emilio Estefan into a worldwide fitness phenomenon.

Television shows like "Dancing with the Stars" and "So You Think You Can Dance" feed the craze.

Smith's studio isn't the only one to offer Zumba locally. Spa Fitness in Capitola and at Dance Synergy in Aptos also have added it.

Smith, 41, a petite and slender brunette, was born to dance. She studied as a youngster, started teaching at age 14, and at age 19, after graduating from Harbor High School, moved to Paris to begin a career as a professional dancer.

As a choreographer, she made \$400 a hour.

Returning home to settle down and start a family, she taught dance in Aptos and developed a clientele of 200 students.

When she outgrew that space, she and her husband, a business consultant, bought the aging Soquel Grange for \$795,000. They renovated it during the summer into a sleek dance studio.

But she didn't know about Zumba until a month ago, when she heard about it from her customers. She drove to Campbell and Visalia to get certified.

She offers eight Zumba classes a week, teaching five herself, and has seen the benefits firsthand.

"I burn 500-900 calories in class," she said.

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## **Santa Cruz Dance Co.**

**WHAT:** Open house for Zumba classes.

**WHEN:** 1, 2:30 and 4 p.m. Oct. 27.

**WHERE:** 2800 Porter St., Soquel.

**COST:** First-time Zumba classes are free. Drop-in classes, \$10 each; eight classes for \$72 or 12 classes for \$96.

INFORMATION: 479-4700, [www.santacruzdancecompany.com](http://www.santacruzdancecompany.com) or [www.zumba.com](http://www.zumba.com)