



Images courtesy of Alan Michaelis

The Virginia Beach Shag Club 40 Years of Dancing, Music & Community Service

By Ron Bessent

Contributor

It is 6:00 PM on a Wednesday evening and the parking lot at DanceSportVA dance studio is filling up fast. Inside members are finding their preferred tables, getting ready for the dancing to begin. Club president Jack Witzenfeld, greets members and visitors alike welcoming everyone as they come into the ballroom. Meanwhile the DJ announces the line dance class for the evening. Tommy Speight is the instructor for tonight's class which is the Tush Push...the floor fills rapidly.

After the line dance class in the junior ballroom next door, Ron and Linda Bessent begin a Basic Carolina Shag lesson teaching the

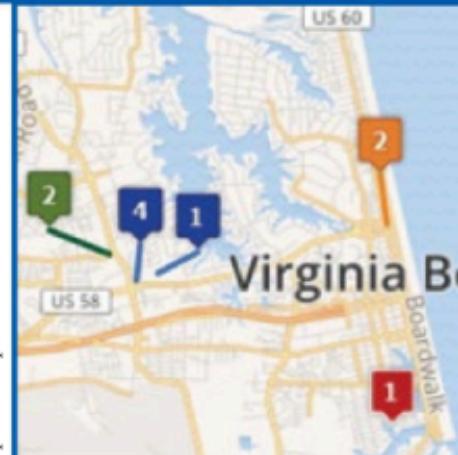
fundamentals of the dance. The men are a little nervous at first, but quickly relax when they realize that everyone is a beginner at this point, and the objective is to have fun while learning something new. With the encouragement from the instructors, everyone in the class seems to relax and enjoy learning the basic steps as their journey into the Shag dance community begins.

In the main ballroom, the lights go down as DJ Gary US Barnes takes over with a moderate beat R&B song. The floor fills as shaggers begin to move back and forth in the traditional

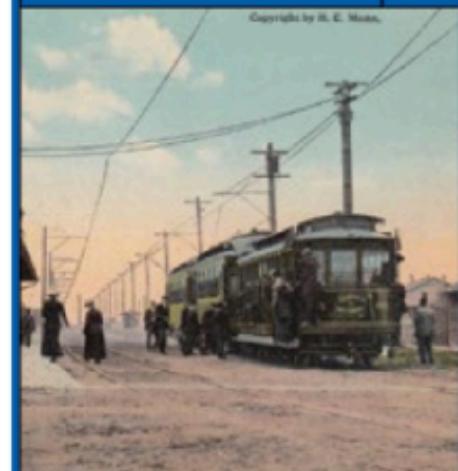
Story continues on page 22

Little Neck & Great Neck

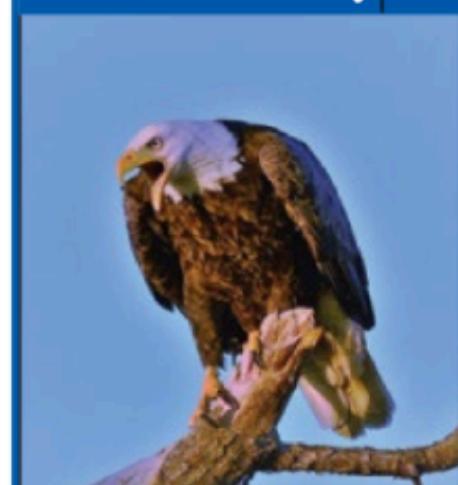
January 2026



Business Updates 6



VB Railroad History 12



Birding & Nature 16

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Continued from Page 1

eight step pattern of the Carolina Shag. Dancers of all levels and ages are enjoying the music and socializing with their friends. So goes the weekly Mix & Mingle at the Virginia Beach Shag Club (VBSC).

So, what is the Carolina Shag? Basically, it is a couples' dance that evolved from the fast dances of the 1930's, 40's, and 50's such as the Lindy, Jitterbug and Bop. However, the shag is a slower smoother version focusing on footwork and form. Most shaggers try and portray a smooth style with the best dancers ap-



pearing to slide across the floor. The music we dance to is written in a 4/4 time, usually 110 to 135 beats per minute. Many of these songs were performed by early Soul, Motown, and Blues artists and played on the juke boxes and clubs along the coasts of North and South Carolina, thus the term "Beach Music" associated with the dance. However, dancers can shag to various types of music including R&B, Pop, and even Country music. The Shag is the state dance of both North and South Carolina.

The Basic step is the foundation of all steps in shag. It is a six count, eight step pattern with couples mirroring each other in an up and back movement. Males start on their left foot while females start on their right. The

pattern and count is as follows: 1 & 2 count: Step up on the 1, step together on the "&", step back on the 2; 3 & 4 count: step back in the 3, step in place on the & - 4 counts; 5 - 6: step back on the 5 and step forward on the 6. (See Shag Step Chart).

The VBSC is a social, non-profit 501(c-7) dance club. Its mission is to bring people together with mutual interests in shag dancing, socializing, developing friendships, promoting beach music and supporting the community through special events and charitable fund raising. To that end, the VBSC has participated in many local events such as the annual Beach Music Festival, shag demonstrations, and dances at local assisted living facilities. The club's primary charitable orga-

nization is Edmarc for Children to which this past year the club donated over \$13,000.00. Additionally, the club conducts fund raisers and supply collections for the local food bank and school children and teachers in Virginia Beach. This past year the club raised over \$3,000 for the families of the two VB police officers that were killed in the line of duty. This was presented to the Virginia Beach Police Officers Foundation for distribution to the families. Also, the club sent donations to the flood victims in Southwestern Virginia and to those in Eastern and Western North Carolina.

The Virginia Beach Shag club was founded in 1985 and has a current membership of over 250. We dance every Wednesday at

DanceSportVA located at 5721 Arrowhead Drive in Virginia Beach. Doors open at 6:00 PM and we dance until 9:30 PM. Dance lessons, both line dances and shag lessons, are conducted during every Mix & Mingle. New Beginner classes are held approximately four times a year and include the basic fundamental steps, beyond basic, and intermediate steps. Additionally, the VBSC provides Basic Shag lessons at the Princess Anne and Kempsville Recreation Centers (contact the recreation centers for more information on these classes).

For more information on the Virginia Beach Shag Club, follow us on our Facebook page, on our Web page (vbshagclub.com), or call 757-617-7318.

Ron Bessent is a member of the Virginia Beach Shag Club and a shag dance instructor.