

DANCES

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a dance troupe was born.

"Everywhere we've gone, we've tried to start a hula group," said Auna, of her military family, "just so our children wouldn't forget their cultural dances."

The group, Olapa O'Ailana (Dancers of the Islands), performed Hawaiian, Tahitian and Samoan dances recently at Henderson Elementary School in Montclair to celebrate Asian Pacific Islander Month in May.

For the audience, the goal is "just letting them be familiar with different Polynesian cultures," she said. Many of her current dancers joined after seeing a performance, she said.

Karen Aguilar finds most of her students come to mambo and salsa classes at Dale City Recreation Center after seeing Latin dance performances. Though the dances are fast and involved, she finds more people come for the skill than the exercise.

"You become very hooked," she said. "It's a challenge."

Aguilar, 31, moved to the U.S. from El Salvador with her family when she was 6. She always knew basic Latin dance moves, but not the names or techniques, she said.

WHEN YOU GO

• **Beginning salsa/mambo, Dale City Recreation Center, 14300 Minnieville Road, (703) 670-7112**

• **Polynesian dance, Linda's Ballet Workshop, Inc., Dillingham Square, Lake Ridge, (703) 590-2739**

• **Belly dancing, Freedom Aquatics and Fitness Center, 10900 University Blvd., Manassas, (703) 993-8444**

After taking classes herself, she teaches and started a performance dance company.

Son Mulato.

Learning the moves to dance to Latin music is an educational and cultural experience, she said.

"You want it to go through that it could be more than just a [dance] class," she said, moments before turning on the heavy percussion sounds of mambo music and talking about the native instruments.

Regardless of dance's origins, each comes with a cultural tag that makes the experience richer, said Howard, cooling off after the belly dancing class.

"If the instructor is cautious, she's going to fold in the cultural significance where she can," she said.

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