



Participants show off their dance moves during a previous Zumbathon. This year's event will be held inside the Downtown Durham YMCA.

Staff photo by Elizabeth Byrum

# Zumbathon will benefit El Centro

## *Durham nonprofits partner to support Hispanic community*

**By Elizabeth Byrum**  
Durham VOICE Arts Editor

Latin-influenced notes of salsa, bachata, merengue and cumbia will fill the Downtown Durham YMCA on Saturday, as participants of El Centro Hispano's Zumbathon dance and shimmy into the night.

Since 2011, the Zumbathon has brought hundreds of community members together for several hours of high-energy Latin dancing.

Zumba Fitness is a Latin-inspired fitness program that features various traditional and modern dance moves. Brook Oliver, group fitness director at the Downtown Durham YMCA, said it is one of YMCA members' favorite classes. A single class is usually one hour long, but the Zumbathon will consist of a three-hour session divided into 15-minute segments, each featuring different instructors from diverse backgrounds.

"Everybody loves Zumba," said Renee Cunningham, a fitness instructor at the Downtown Durham YMCA and a past Zumbathon instructor. "The music is

lively and upbeat. It's a place where we can for one hour, just set the stress aside, and party for one hour. With the Zumbathon, it's party for three hours!"

El Centro Hispano's fourth Zumbathon and will be hosted at the Downtown Durham YMCA on Feb. 23, 5 - 8 p.m. The Zumbathon is a major fundraising event for the Durham-based nonprofit. Francisco Duque, development and human resources director of El Centro Hispano said this year, they are expecting up to 300 participants and hope to collect \$2,000 for the organization. Tickets are available online for \$10. On the day of the Zumbathon, tickets will be available for \$20 at the door.

"It's a great cause to support the work of El Centro Hispano and all of the funds collected are going to El Centro," Duque said.

Although El Centro is working with the Downtown Durham YMCA, the emphasis is on supporting El Centro's four core programs: education, health, community organization and support services. Each year, El Centro's serv-

es benefit more than 12,000 community members.

### **Celebrating diversity**

Zholima Vargas, a certified Zumba instructor and the support services director at El Centro, believes that the Zumbathon embodies these core programs while appealing to the greater community.

#### **About the Zumbathon**

**Who:** You!

**What:** El Centro Hispano's 4th Annual Zumbathon

**When:** Feb. 23, 5-8 p.m.

**Where:** Downtown Durham YMCA

218 West Morgan Street  
Durham, NC 27701

Phone: 919-667-9622

**Why:** To raise money for El Centro Hispano's community outreach efforts.

**How Much:** \$10 online, \$20 at the door

For Vargas, Zumba is about sharing culture, while encouraging physical activity for everyone. She added that Zumba is a group activity that brings diverse people together through its mix of dancing, physical activity and culture. Drawing from a wide range of influences, the music is very inclusive, she said.

"Zumba is a good way to break the ice, to feel comfortable whether they are part of the Latino community or not," she added.

It also helps showcase El Centro's work to the greater community and bring people together for a great cause, she said. This year, Vargas is participating in the Zumbathon for the first time.

"Always, the community shows a lot of interest because we have the largest Zumbathon here in Durham," Duque said.

He emphasized the event hopes to include all community members, whether Latino or not, from ages six to 90, as long as they come ready to dance.

"Zumba is a party, and Zumba is joyful," he said. "It is a big, fun party for the whole family."

*"The music brings people together," Renee Cunningham said. "It's the celebration and the fiesta we all love and crave."*

### More than Music

"I tend to like merengue and reggaeton, so I'll bring those beats, and salsa," Cunningham said. "I'll actually do three songs. We've got an instructor from Argentina, so she'll do Argentinian music. Cubano, there's just so many Latino cultures represented."

Cunningham has volunteered as an instructor at each of the previous Zumbathons, but this year she is also working as an organizer. Cunningham is the event liaison between the YMCA instructors and El Centro Hispano, and is responsible for making sure that no song is repeated during the three hours of dance. In addition, Cunningham has worked to incorporate social media as a method of promoting this year's Zumbathon to the community and hopes this will also bring more participation.

She thinks that the support of the YMCA will allow community members to make a connection with El Centro. She is asking her own students to support El Centro and attend the event. Other YMCA group fitness instructors are also encouraged to inform their followers about the mission of El Centro Hispano.

"People need to know why," said Oliver, group fitness director at the YMCA. "If they don't understand what El Centro is doing and why we are doing this, they may not want to participate. I wanted to make sure that our instructors knew what El Centro is and that they can share that with our members and hopefully it will bleed out into the rest of the community."

For Cunningham, music is all about passion, and it's what keeps her connected. She also sees Zumba as an important stress release.

"The music brings people together," Cunningham said. "It's the celebration and the fiesta we all love and crave."

### Cultivating Community

Prior to the Zumbathon, the YMCA and El Centro have worked together to offer Latin dance classes to the community, taught by El Centro staff members.

"The Durham Y is really working on being more culturally-sensitive to Spanish-speaking people in our community, so the best way for us to do that is partnering with another organization that's really good at it, that way we can get better," Oliver said.

Partnering with El Centro Hispano was a natural way to reach the Spanish-speaking community.

To continue fostering a relationship with the Latino community, Oliver, along with several other YMCA directors, is working to launch La Voz, a volunteer Spanish-speaking advisory board. The board's first meeting will be in March.

"We're hoping that it will be a way we can communicate effectively and well, create programs around their needs, and not what we think they need," Oliver said.

By hosting the 2013 Zumbathon at the YMCA, they are already taking steps to reach out to the greater Spanish-speaking community, and raise awareness of the services the YMCA offers.

"The Y is here for everybody in our community, not just the people that are in these four walls," Oliver said.

For Cunningham, fostering a diverse community is particularly beneficial for future generations. The Zumbathon is just one example of a community effort that is focused on encouraging diversity and increasing awareness, and El Centro Hispano is an organization committed to continuing these goals.

"It represents the roots that I am, from my Mexican-American heritage; I'm third generation," Cunningham said. "So I don't want to lose that. I have my own kids and I want them to stay connected to that community as well."

*For more information, contact Francisco Duque at 919-687-4635 ext. 34, or visit the Zumbathon 2013 website: <http://elcentronc.org/elcentrohispano/zumba.html>*