

Champion dancer two-steps his way from Hollywood to NAU

By Angie Neumann
The Lumberjack

He's jammed with rock'n'roll legend Eddie Cochran, he's best friends with General Hospital's Jacklyn Zeman (Bobbie), he has three United States patents and has taught world championship dancers. Now at 55, he's majoring in computer science at NAU.

Clad in faded blue jeans, a denim jacket and boots with a back-pack slung over his shoulder, H. Leon Raper blends right in with the college scene.

It's a scene quite different from the fast-moving pace of Los Angeles, Calif., where he's "met half of Hollywood" at celebrity parties, but Raper doesn't mind the change.

"I wanted to get the hell out of Los Angeles," Raper said.

"I got tired of sitting in parking lots that are supposed to be freeways. I didn't even know my next door neighbors. I know all kinds of people here," he said.

Raper maintains his Hollywood contacts though, as he continues to operate Raper Enterprises Agency, which books soap stars, prime-time stars, movie stars and sports celebrities for special events such as personal appearances and concerts.

Raper said he is not quite sure what made him take the "Hollywood plunge" but he's glad he did, as most of his income is from bookings. It seems natural that Raper would find his niche among Hollywood's brightest stars, as he grew up with Cochran, one of rock'n'roll's biggest legends.

In the '50s and '60s, he played bass guitar with Cochran "before anyone knew who he was." Cochran was best known for *Summertime Blues*.

Raper also was a talent agent in Beverly Hills, Calif., and represented clients for motion pictures, television and theater.

Ken Curtis (Festus on *Guns, Smokey*) was a long-time client and good friend until his death last year.

Raper has many friends among the Hollywood jet-set crowd and he met his best friend on the set of General Hospital.

Zeman is "one of the nicest people you'd ever want to meet" he said of the petite fiery red-head diva of daytime.

Before Raper began his Hollywood stint, he worked as a senior development engineer of digital and analog circuits for aerospace, military, industrial and consumer electronic products for an international company in Anaheim, Calif. His work yielded five U.S. patents.

To maintain his sanity, Raper has been dancing for more than 25 years and has studied with some of the most respected teachers in the business.

His first experience with dancing came when he joined Parent's Without Partners, a national organization for singles.

"The desire to dance is a highly contagious disease for which I hope they never find a cure," Raper said. "The more you dance the worse the disease gets and the more it spreads to others."

Raper has been sharing his talents with others by teaching country/western dances, such as the two-step, line dances and shuffles, West Coast Swing, waltz, Latin, jitterbug and the tango.

He also teaches advanced competition material such as aeriels, lifts

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—Leon Raper, dance teacher,
computer science major

and drops.

Raper's competition dancing experience includes more than 400 West Coast Swing contests, including a World Championship Contest at the Palladium in Hollywood.

In Flagstaff, people are mainly interested in learning country/western dances, Raper said, and because students cannot afford the cost of dance lessons, Raper offers a free dance class for NAU students. They are held at the Recreation Center the last Wednesday of each month from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m.

Raper also teaches Wednesday evenings from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at South Beaver Elementary School.

"I feel dancing is the best physical and mental therapy known to man," Raper said. "It helps bring new relationships together or helps restore relationships that have fallen into difficulty.

"It helps build one's self confidence, shows people how to meet new people and build the bond of friendship with others that is a necessary component of a happy life."



David Ripley/The Lumberjack
H. Leon Raper demonstrates dance steps with his assistant, Diane Sundholm, at the Museum Club Thursday where he gives free dance lessons.