



**Name:** Kurt Werner

**Dance Company:** Evolve Arts Collective

**Tell us about your company:** Evolve Arts Collective is an emerging performance and creative hub that strives to provide a capacity for artists across the Okanagan to promote and perform works that push the boundaries between art disciplines to help act as a platform in that pursuit and to continue expanding his network with artists across all disciplines. The creative processes are aimed to create authentic and raw content in hopes that we can offer our audience members a new perspective on matters and ideas.

**What years have you participated as a professional instructor?** I participated in 2015 with Val Cocar and in 2018 with Martine Parent.

**How did you first learn about Swinging with the Stars?** Back when I was teaching at Kelowna Dance & Performing Arts, Melodie Sharma was instructing Loyal Wooldridge and Ian Roth and she asked me to help demonstrate the lead/follow mechanics of partner dancing. The following year, through KDPA I learned that Val was looking for a partner and I decided I wanted to live the full experience, dive in and be a part of the event that time around.

**Why did you agree to teach our local celebrities their dances?** I had only moved to Kelowna three years prior to my first time with SWTS and I was keeping to myself. I really wanted to get involved with community, meet as many people as I can all while having a fun time dancing the night away.

**What was the funniest moment you had with one of our local celebrities?** Both times, one of my top funniest moments is during the first rehearsal when I revealed the music, the concept and how fast we were going to be moving after teaching the first couple of steps. Val and Martine had the best expressions on their faces were priceless but they both pulled it off and did a splendid job with their routines.

**What is it about Swinging with the Stars that makes it so special, or that sets it apart from other events?**

The gathering of the community for a cause is something I'm always excited to see happen. Beyond people coming to attend to the event there are so many behind-the-scenes contributions that people sometimes don't recognize. There are studios that donate their space, individuals who donate their time and resources, businesses who share their promotional platforms and so much more. It really shows that we when come together to work toward a common goal, anything is possible.

**How has Swinging with the Stars impacted your life?** I left home at a young age to pursue my professional dance training and during that time I wasn't able to make it home in time to be with my grandparents or relatives when they were placed in palliative care and at the time of their passing. Knowing that the funds raised for COHA would help provide support for those near the end of their lives, ensuring that they are not alone in case family members weren't able to make it, it is a powerful thing. I can't imagine what it would be like to be alone at that stage in my life and I'm grateful that the work done at COHA helps both the patient and family members who are in a similar situation that I was in.