

Polka royalty bid

Deborah Fillmer dancing her way from Alabama for this year's contest

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Her home's in Alabama, but her heart's in Ennis.

Deborah Platt Fillmer tries to never miss a National Polka Festival – even though it means traveling across a few states to be there.

This year she'll fulfill a life-long dream when she dances in the King & Queen Contest Friday night – a moment made even more special by her dance partner.

"My dad and I have been dancing together since I was about 5. When I was really little, my mom and dad used to put me on their arms between them or on their shoulders and we would dance around," she said.

"National Polka Festival's been going on for 41 years – I'm 42, and I've probably missed just eight or 10 of them since I was itty bitty," she said. "That is my heritage, I've grown up with it – it's in my blood, I think."

She lives in Auburn, Alabama, but she grew up in the Plano area, with family and home ties in Ennis.

Her dad, David Platt, lives in the Dallas area, but whenever the father and daughter get together, they dance.

This year, for the first time, she will be joined at the National Polka Festival by her little grandson, William. "If I have anything to do with it, he will be learning some really cool dance steps," Fillmer said.

While only a portion of the thousands of National Polka Festival attendees wear traditional Czech costume, Fillmer likes the festive atmosphere created by the costumes. A talent for textiles led her to sew coordinating costumes for her grandson, her dad, herself, her husband and her niece – and she blogged online about the process.

"We'll all be matching. There will be five generations of our family there," she said.

"That's what I like about the National Polka Festival – kids can come, it's very family-oriented," she said.

Where there's a will, there's a shirt. She hand-embroidered the traditional puffy Czech-style sleeves for her father's shirt, attaching them to a store-bought shirt that she removed the original sleeves from.

"I had plenty of fabric left over from making my costume for the festival so I decided to make a matching one for my niece, Baleigh," she said.

"I also made a vest to match my dress for my husband, Scott, who, although he likes to dance with me, does not embrace the same competitive gene that my father and I possess," she said.

A knitting pattern designer by trade, she enjoyed the sewing, lace, hand embroidery, and trim work that allowed her to be creative. But she's not planning on stopping with one costume.

"I already have my color scheme picked out for next year's costume," she said.

This is the first year she's been in the King & Queen contest, although she's danced along before the contest many times and watched as couples were eliminated and a dancing pair was crowned.

Of course, there's more to the National Polka Festival than dancing.

"My favorite food is the cream cheese kolaches. My husband Scott's favorite National Polka Festival food is the klobase – he has to have sauerkraut," she said.

Every year, after the banners come down and the costumes are put away, there's one final step Deborah Fillmer never misses.

"We reserve our hotel rooms for the next year the day we leave the polka festival," she said.

So what will it take to earn the title of King & Queen?

"You have to know your partner, and dance well together," she said. "And you have to be happy."

When it comes to the National Polka Festival, Fillmer has that qualification, well, sewed up.

"I think polka music makes you happy – it's uplifting. And dancing with my dad makes me happy," she said.

Check out Deborah Fillmer's blog on preparing for National Polka Festival here:

<http://www.nauticalknitter.com/category/costuming/>