

'Icon in the community' — Fayetteville mourns ballroom dancer, instructor Roland Bersch Jr.

[Akira Kyles](#)

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Roland Bersch, founder of Roland's Dance Studio, died Friday from complications from COVID-19, leaving behind a ballroom dancing legacy.

Bersch was born in 1930 in Biloxi, Mississippi. At the age of 17, he joined the Army and traveled all over the United States and taught people how to dance. Bersch founded Roland's Dance Studio, located at 310 Hope Mills Road, and it has been in business for more than 50 years.

[Faces of the pandemic: After COVID deaths, Fayetteville families are left with memories](#)

“He was a great ambassador for ballroom dancing, and he was able to participate in lots of opportunities to showcase volunteers,” said Drew Ziegler with the Cape Fear Ballroom Dancers.

“He would volunteer to coach dancers to perform in various events like Fayetteville Dancing with the Stars for a number of years. He would be very much involved with that, usually performing.”

Ziegler added that Bersch was a great dancer and a social person; people liked being around him.

Bersch, who was married twice, had five children.



Bersch partially retired from working at the dance studio about 20 years ago, according to Sunday Rochelle Handley, his daughter.

She described her father as always happy, healthy and would've been dancing well into his 100s — which she says is one reason his death was rather shocking.

“Everybody else in the COVID section was on ventilators and stuff like that,” Handley said. “He was breathing; he never even needed oxygen. So, he was just so healthy and I brought him to the hospital the day after Christmas.”

More: [PHOTOS: Roland Bersch Jr., founder of Roland’s Dance Studio, 1930-2021](#)

Handley said he came down with pneumonia, but COVID got into his kidneys and caused acute kidney failure.

She said she and her family are working to keep the studio going through the pandemic.



“We're a family that kind of works together although the studio is closed,” she said. “There's a few lessons going on here and there; we're trying to survive through this COVID stuff so it doesn't take the studio, too.”

Many members of the dance community are mourning the loss of Bersch.

“I've sent out text messages and emails to our club members, and the club is just devastated,” said Ziegler. “Everybody in the club just worships Roland, and it's really been a tough time for the membership because he was an integral part of not only our club but the ballroom dancing community. Probably half of Fayetteville learned how to dance from Roland.”

According to Handley, her father wanted to be remembered through dancing and celebration.



“His final wishes were always to have a huge party with his favorite New Orleans-style music with a live trio band and everyone dancing and drinking and socializing and having fun instead of a service where people are mourning,” said Handley.

They plan to hold something like he wanted for his final wishes, but not until COVID-19 is clear and it’s safe for people to gather.

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