



Miss Cleiland Donnan and one of her cotillion students in 1958.

MAY I HAVE THIS DANCE?

Junior Assembly Cotillion celebrates 70 years.

THOUGH TODAY'S TEENS AND TWEENS communicate with each other mostly through tweets and texts, older generations can rest assured that face-to-face manners still matter. Social graces—and the confidence that comes with them—are instilled in hundreds of Richmond-area 6th through 9th graders each weekend during the season of the Junior Assembly Cotillion, the oldest organization of its kind in the state, where children gather to learn dancing, etiquette and more. The cotillion will wrap its 70th season this year, culminating in the annual Cupid's Ball Feb. 8.

Over the years, this storied organization has been through five successive woman-owned and operated chapters. It also tends to run in the family: Current cotillion owners and sisters Elizabeth Williams

gloves are often accented by whimsically printed bowties and bright dresses, and the playlist is filled with pop music.

You'll also find Junior Assembly Cotillion on all the hot social media platforms like Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram. And grade-specific "manners cards" are given to participants when they register, detailing current, relevant tips like cell phone and texting etiquette, gratuity guidelines and the importance of practicing respect and kindness. "We take traditions and make them current," says Williams.

More than anything, though, cotillion is a place to have fun, says Norton. "Even Miss Donnan was a strong believer that this was not just a business." Manners and fun need not be mutually exclusive. JuniorAssemblyCotillion.com —By Meridith Ingram

and Katherine Byer took over the business from their mother, Susan Norton, and her colleague, Jackie Davidson, in 2013. When Norton and Davidson took over in 1984, they bought the business from Cleiland Donnan, who ran the chapter known informally as "Miss Donnan's Cotillion" for 28 years beginning in 1956. And Donnan took over from her mother, Edloe Donnan.

It's important to note that "traditional" doesn't necessarily mean boring or stuffy. Of course, from the outset, children are taught the importance of eye contact, firm handshakes and formal introductions, and older children are taught how to properly initiate a date.

Young gentlemen are encouraged to use a "mighty right arm" to escort young ladies on and off the dance floor where they learn dances like the waltz, the jitterbug and the merengue. But today, standard blue blazers and girls' white

FLOWER HOUR

Garden Club of Virginia Symposium 2015.

CAN'T WAIT UNTIL spring for the next Historic Garden Week in Virginia to get your fix of splendid blooms? Then head to the Colonial Williamsburg Lodge Feb. 2-4 for a celebration of all things gardening at the Garden Club of Virginia's Symposium 2015 (the fifth such event since the first symposium was held in 2008).

The event, which has been organized by a committee of 37 Garden Club members from around the state, will host more than 50 classes, demonstrations, excursions and seminars, including a discussion led by James River Association director Bill Street and a special guided tour of Bassett Hall (the former home of John D. Rockefeller Jr.). The grand finale, says



symposium chairman Terry Buntrock (a member of the Williamsburg Garden Club), will be "Snipped!"—a flower-arranging competition based on the model of popular cooking shows like *Iron Chef*. Celebrity contestants (noted floral designers James Farmer, Sybil Sylvester and Michael Grim) will create floral arrangements that will be judged by luminaries from prominent Virginia horticulture organizations like Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens and Colonial Williamsburg. Our verdict: Everything's coming up roses. Registration is \$280. CGVirginia.com/Symposium

—By Taylor Pilkington

LET IT SNOW

Winter's natural fertilizer.

AFTER MOVING FROM Australia to Virginia, Nicole Schermerhorn knew she didn't want to raise animals on the nearly 40 acres of land that had been in her husband's family for six generations.

Too much work, she says. "Well, it turns out the herb plants need as much care and attention," Schermerhorn admits with a chuckle, her Australian accent coming through.

Though Lavender Fields Herb Farm in Glen Allen employs more than 20 people March through May to do that work, as any home

gardener knows, there's still plenty to do in the colder months. Says Schermerhorn, the foundation for a lively herb garden is laid in the dead of winter.

"To me, that would be organic compost," says Schermerhorn, adding that the soil-building concoction can even be applied atop a layer of snow.

"Snow is poor man's fertilizer," she says. Unlike ice, "it's an insulator for the herbs."

The 12-year-old wholesale business grows starters for 250 varieties of USDA-certified



organic herb and vegetable plants, which are sold at garden centers throughout the mid-Atlantic.

Mint comes in flavored varieties from chocolate to pineapple that can all inspire their share of cocktails. Stevia can be grown alongside as a natural sweetener and Sweet Annie

as medicine for the common cold.

The farm's top-selling herb is basil, which, surprisingly, Schermerhorn says is probably the hardest for home growers to keep alive. That's partially because many plant it in March when they should wait until Mother's Day.

What about the herb after which her Lavender Fields Herb Farm is named?

It naturally prefers a dry, rocky climate, but, says Schermerhorn, "it can be done." —By Whitney Pipkin

Lavender Fields Farm offers classes year-round on the art of growing herbs. LavenderFieldsFarm.com