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It is Friday night at Sneaky Pete's restaurant and bar in Bonita Springs, Fla., and the dance floor is jammed.

A band called The Hype is blasting "Mustang Sally" and "Louie Louie," and the dancers are singing along, hands in the air, booties shaking, bodies sweating.

Almost all are well over 60. Some are past 70. They dance for hours.

"I have a totally different lifestyle here," says Beryl Mento, 66 years old, originally from Michigan. "Up there, I am Grandma and Mom. Here, I am Skyy," her dancing nickname and favorite vodka. "I had friends who had cute nicknames and I said, 'I want a nickname like that.' "

It is well known that Florida retirees play golf, sit on the beach and occasionally use walkers. They also rock out by the thousands at South Florida bars, looking for romance or just having fun.

In the enormous Coconut Point mall up the Gulf coast toward Fort Myers, Frank Pileggi, a 57-year-old crooner from the Jersey shore who performs under the stage name Frank Torino, is belting out "Love Me Tonight" and "Viva Las Vegas" for restaurant patrons. After dinner, he leads the crowd in line dances called the Cupid Shuffle and the Electric Slide, and in lots of jitterbug. Women outnumber men on the packed outdoor dance floor.



Florida restaurants and clubs are full of dancing baby boomers.

"If I had my choice I would go out almost every night. It is my hobby; it is my favorite thing to do," says Carol Snyder, a 74-year-old with white hair and a deep tan who moved from Findlay, Ohio, 10 years ago. She and her husband hit Pagelli's restaurant in the mall to dance to Mr. Torino's songs as often as twice a week. When her husband gets tired, she and a female friend rock together, with others often joining. The dance floor gets so crowded she sometimes gets stepped on.

Not all Florida retirees go dancing, of course, but with baby boomers retiring, crowds are getting big.

Some are singles doing things they haven't done since high school, this time without parental guidance. Some women show up in slinky black dresses, sequins and plunging necklines, although many others are in pants. Men lean toward T-shirts, Aloha shirts, shorts and jeans. To attract older dancers, some clubs offer music at 6 p.m. or earlier and advertise early-bird dinners.

People say they get tired of feeling old. They hit the Sandy Parrot, the Stage, the Blue Martini and the Parrot Key. A dance is held Sundays at the Bonita Springs Elks Lodge, regularly drawing 200 dancers, almost all well over 60. The jammed parking lot ranges from pickup trucks to yellow sports cars. Some bars have expanded or brought in more bands.

Liz Castleman, 71, a native of Gary, Ind., spends half the year in Nashville and half in Naples, Fla. She goes dancing at places like the Naples Beach Hotel and Bond. On Thursdays she dances with the Naples, Fla., Singles Network.

Dancing is good for older people's health and balance, studies show, especially salsa, says Timothy Dougherty, medical director of the emergency department at nearby Cape Coral Hospital. Still, in the past two or three years he has treated a growing number of older people for heart attacks suffered while dancing. Two or three couldn't be saved, he says.

Ms. Castleman, a retired teacher and interior decorator, says she never has seen anyone have a heart attack dancing, but she can think of worse ways to die.

"What a better way to go than anything: just drop over dead. That would be really wonderful, actually," she says.

"When you turn 70, you're like, 'When did that happen? When did I get to be old?' " she says. "I'm going to live every day to the very end."



Ms. Mento—Skyy—and her husband, Dominick, return to Michigan to see children in the summer, but they rarely dance there. Places there are aimed at younger patrons. "Down here there are so many bars and restaurants that have entertainment and it is mostly people our age," she says.

Ms. Mento is a fan of Mr. Torino, famous locally for his imitations of Tom Jones, Elvis and Frank Sinatra. Counting private parties, he performs almost every night in the winter season.

"They are 70, they are 80, they are 90, and they love me," he says of his fans. "The hard part of this is seeing their spouses come in, and then they will come one day and say, 'You remember Shirley, well, she passed away. ' "



"We preach to our friends: Get out of that easy chair and dance!" he says. He figures it is good exercise for his brain, too, "because you need to keep thinking to follow the steps."



Larry Schwartz, 66, a retired New York City police detective, is a widower who sometimes meets women online and takes them to dinner and dancing. He also goes dancing with friends.

"There are like four or five places that we go to at least Friday and Saturday. Sometimes we go on a Wednesday and they are all mobbed all the time," he says. "Everybody is in the same boat; everybody is looking for somebody."

Steve Vigorito, 61, says older dancers are known locally as "snowcaps" for their white and gray hair. Some overdo it and lose their balance while dancing, he says, "but the dance floor out there is so crowded that you start to go and everyone grabs hold of you."

Mr. Vigorito retired more than 10 years ago and now organizes a group of seniors including the Mentos and Mr. Schwartz who hit Sneaky Pete's and Sandy Parrot together.

"We have a saying that I like," he says. "People up north survive. Down here, we live."