



# Lab employee doubles as salsa student, teacher, and performer

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In April 2002, scientist and mathematician Darrin Visarraga came to the Laboratory to develop computer simulations for physical infrastructures.

“Soon after moving to Los Alamos,” Visarraga recalls, “I found myself working all the time and in dire need of an outlet.”

And so Visarraga began taking free dance lessons offered by two Laboratory post docs. He soon discovered a passion for salsa—a dance that originated Latino communities in New York City in the mid-1970s and combined movements from earlier dance forms, such as the Cha-cha-cha, Mambo, Son Montuno, and Bomba.

When Visarraga’s teachers left town in 2006, he decided to fill their shoes and began teaching classes in Los Alamos and around Northern New Mexico.

Visarraga, who is from San Francisco originally, was influenced by the Los Angeles salsa movement, which encourages dancers to step on the first beat and follow a straight line, like ballroom or swing dances. This style is different from the jazz-influenced approach used in New York, in which dancers step on the second beat.

“I felt really bad for the students in my first few rounds of classes,” he notes with a laugh. “At the beginning, I wanted to model everything I was doing based on how I was taught. It wasn’t until I started becoming comfortable with my own movement that my confidence began to build. That’s what I am hoping my students take away from my lessons: for them to open up and embrace dance movement as a result of their own self-expression.”

Visarraga teaches free salsa classes on Wednesday nights from 7–8:30 p.m. at the Los Alamos Senior Center and at The Studio in Santa Fe on Sundays from 3:30–6 p.m. He recommends the [Santa Fe Bandstand](#) free concert series on the Santa Fe Plaza for a variety of live salsa music shows during July and August.

See more New Mexico salsa events at [Visarraga’s website](#).

[See a longer version of this profile here.](#)

“To gain confidence as a dancer, you have to let go of your inhibitions and let your movements connect organically,” he says. “It’s a philosophy that can be applied to anything in life—learn the dance structure, then make it your own.”

**Los Alamos National Laboratory**

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