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Business boost

Council wants to infuse a bit more economic life into the city and is striking a committee of local people from the private and public sectors to help.

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Ballroom beauties

Richmond's top-ranked amateur ballroom dancers, Joel Marasigan and Clara Shih, hope to waltz to international fame in Vancouver next week.

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Richmond News

A V A N N E T N E W S P A P E

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Fred and Ginger would be proud

By MICHELLE HOPKINS
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What's love got to do with it? Everything for Richmond's top-ranked amateur ballroom dancers Joel Marasigan and Clara Shih.

What started as a love affair blossomed into an award-winning partnership.

Now the couple hopes to waltz their way to the podium at the prestigious SnowBall Classic International DanceSport Competition next week in Vancouver.

"Our relationship off the floor was growing, and we felt that it would be natural for us to partner on the dance floor as well," said the 25-year-old Marasigan.

In 1997, Shih met Marasigan at UBC's famed Dance Club and within months they were an item. Neither considered giving up their dance partners at the time, however, within months that changed.

Even though Marasigan was a novice, that didn't deter love-struck Shih.

"He was a natural. We share the same goals and passion for dancing," said the 27-year-old Shih. "Our emotional bond just seems to make us work well together."

In less than four years, the pair's chemistry has earned them the title of B.C. champs twice. They are also ranked fourth in Canada.

"We feel the music and we have lots of movements, that's what makes us stand out," said Shih, adding their toughest competition at the Snowball Classic will come from fellow Canadians who hail from Toronto and Montreal.

Placing well at the classic will also go a long

way to bolster the couple's international credentials.

"To win the SnowBall Classic means international recognition as well as world ranking points," explained Marasigan. "It's similar to professional tennis tours, you need points to establish your world ranking and to make it into competitions."

Their training and rehearsals are grueling. Often they spend as many as eight hours a day, five days a week rehearsing.

The pair split their time between B.C., Ontario and England.

"We have five trainers; one here in Richmond, two in Toronto and two in London, England," Marasigan explained. "We want to be the best in Canada and because all the past champions hail from England, we spend two and a half months

there. It's the Mecca of ballroom dancers."

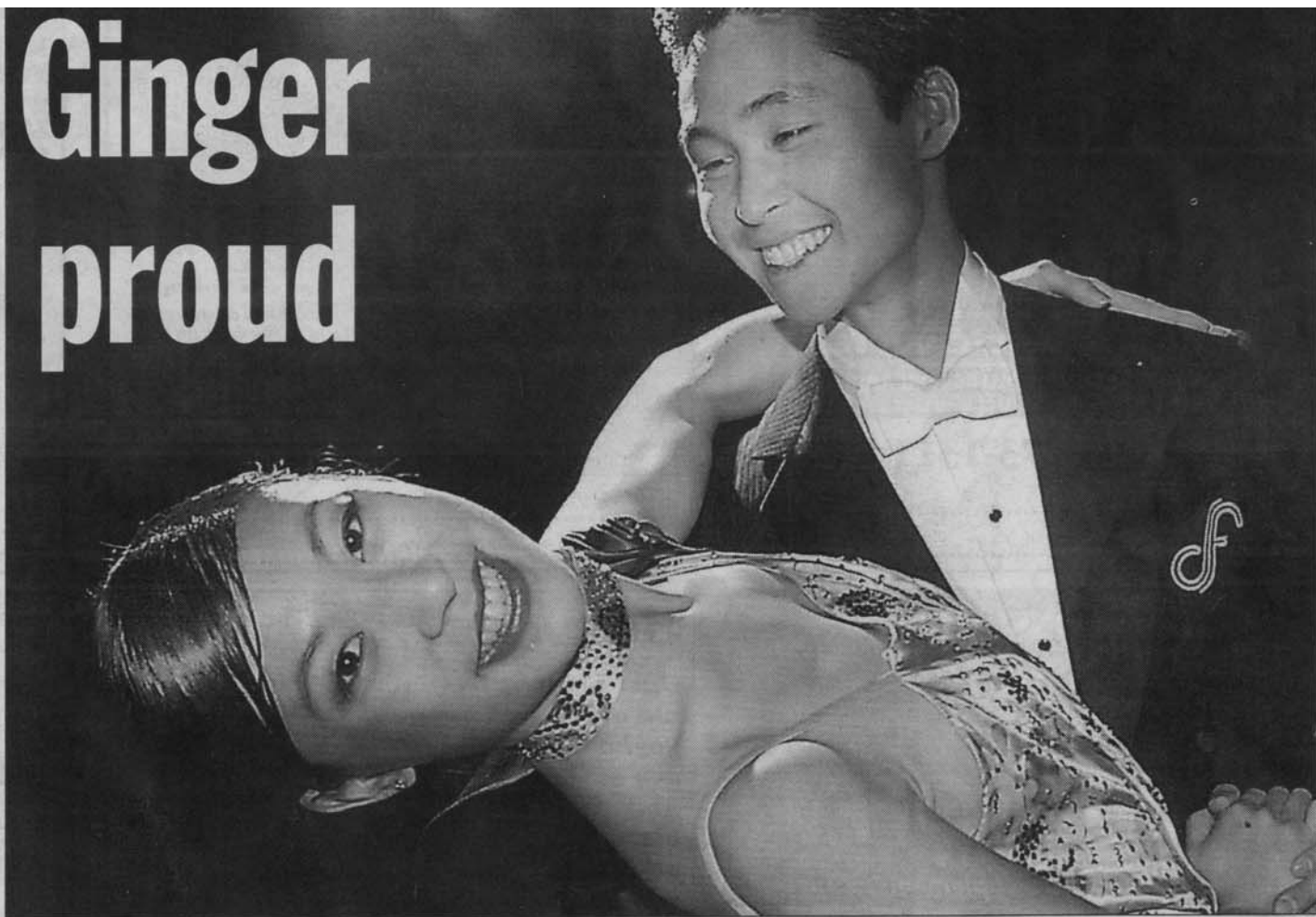
Their strength, she said, is in their expressive dance style.

The championships, held for the first time in North America, are expected to draw competitors from more than 30 countries, including China, Japan, Russia, England, Germany, and the U.S.

"Our goal is to become the top Canadian amateurs and then eventually turn professional and teach," said Shih.

"We want to share our love of ballroom dancing with others."

The couple will dance into the annual SnowBall Classic International DanceSport Competition Feb. 21 to 23 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Vancouver. On the Web at www.snowballclassic.com.



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B.C. Champions...

Joel Marasigan and Clara Shih hope to woo the judges at the prestigious SnowBall Classic International DanceSport Competition in Vancouver next week.