For an authority figure, the soft-spoken and cordial Moab City Police Chief Mike Navarre is not an imposing guy.
Correction: He is not an imposing guy, unless your name is Lisa Albert, and you’ve just found out that your rival contestant and his partner have spent 156 hours to date preparing for this year’s Dancing with the Moab Stars event.

“Good gosh,” Albert said.

In comparison, Albert and dance partner Steve Hawks have been practicing for about two hours a week ahead of the event, which is coming to the Grand County High School auditorium on Friday, Oct. 16, at 7 p.m.

The Moab Valley Multicultural Center fundraiser pairs experienced dancers like Albert up with newbies like Hawks, although Albert thinks that Hawks’ background as a musician and Mill Creek Station drummer makes him a natural on the dance floor. The pair have been working with choreographer Sandi Snead on a spicy jazz dance number, and Albert said that Hawks has been a good sport about whatever they throw at him.

“If we’re behind half a beat, he’ll say we’re behind half a beat, and that we need to pick it up,” she said. “He’s able to move really well, and this dance requires some jazzy kinds of moves.”

Navarre, meanwhile, described himself as totally inexperienced—although you’d never know it if you watched a video of him practicing with dance partner and Moab City Police administrative secretary Cindy Montague.

“He’s a fast learner,” Montague said. “He’s caught on.”

Navarre took a number of bachata and salsa classes before event organizers assigned him to Montague, who has been dancing since she was about 7 years old. With two weeks to go before they hit the stage together, Montague was vowing to ramp up their practice sessions, whether or not Navarre’s nerves are frayed.

“I wish this was today,” he said. “I need this to be done.”

Dancing with the Moab Stars organizers first approached Navarre last year with the hope that he would join their inaugural event, although he was able to talk his way out of it. When they returned earlier this year, however, he had no such luck.

“They stayed with me this year until I said I’d do it,” he said.

The self-deprecating Navarre and Montague are one of eight “celebrity” dancing couples that organizers recruited this year. Other famous faces include Moab Regional Hospital CEO Jen Sadoff, Back of Beyond Books owner Andy Nettell, National Park Service employee Chris Wonderly and Coyote Shuttles owner/ operator Kristi Jensen.

Now that he’s committed to it, Navarre will put his best foot forward for a good cause—and he’ll be satisfied if they finish seventh out of eighth.

“It isn’t about winning for me,” Navarre said. “I want to get through it.”
Montague is in a more competitive mood, vowing that the pair will bring their A-game to the high school auditorium. She assured Navarre that he has nothing to worry about, snapping her fingers to make the point that time will rush right by them.

“That’s what I tell him – it’s going to go that fast,” she said.

Albert said that pre-dance jitters were common during the lead-up to last year’s event, as she and Red Cliffs Lodge owner Colin Fryer learned how to cha-cha together.

“It is kind of intimidating or scary, but after we did it, everybody was so pumped up,” she said.

Beyond the fun of the moment, the experience also gave her the chance to meet new people, and to build lasting friendships – an opportunity that arose again in 2015.

Albert has lived in Moab for 18 years, yet until this year, she’d never met Hawks, who serves as Utah State University-Moab’s dean.

“He said, ‘How is it possible that our paths have never crossed before this?’” she said.

After all of the time they’ve spent together since then, Albert expects that the sense of excitement on stage will be followed by a brief sense of loss.

“It’s kind of sad when it’s over,” she said. “It’s a lot of preparation for a few minutes work.”

Dancing with the Moab Stars benefits Moab Valley Multicultural Center

“It’s kind of sad when it’s over ... It’s a lot of preparation for a few minutes work.”

When: Friday, Oct. 16, at 7 p.m.

Where: Grand County High School auditorium, 608 S. 400 East

Cost: Advance tickets are $12 per adult, or $8 for people 18 and under; tickets are available at the Moab Valley Multicultural Center, Canyonlands Copy Center, Back of Beyond Books and WabiSabi East. Ticket prices at the door will increase to $15 per adult.