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THE MAGAZINE FOR AAA MEMBERS

# Backyard Discoveries

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# Journey western



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## Antonio Diaz

CHEF AND SALSA DANCER

**IN SPANISH, THE WORD "RUMBA" MEANS PARTY,** a concept that sums up the spirit and Latin flavor that Lima native Antonio Diaz brings to his adopted hometown of Bellingham. A chef, musician and award-winning salsa dancer, Diaz serves up casual Peruvian fare at his downtown deli, Café Rumba ([caferumbabaham.com](http://caferumbabaham.com)), and shares the rhythms of Cuba and beyond with the community through Rumba Northwest, the dance company he runs with his wife, Heather. Diaz hosts popular salsa dance nights (occasionally with live music) at Café Rumba on the first, second and third Saturdays of every month.

### WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO THE NORTHWEST?

I came to Seattle to study aviation and business, and after that I moved to France for a year to study language and culinary techniques.

### HOW DID YOU GET INTO SALSA DANCING?

In France, at the restaurant where I worked, I met this lady who had danced for the famous Tropicana cabaret in Cuba, and I started discovering more and learning the culture. When I went back to Peru, I tried out teaching what I'd learned. Then I came to Seattle again, and that's when I met Heather. She was working on a folk festival in Juneau and decided to invite a Seattle salsa band, Cambalache. I'm very good friends with the lead, Pancho, so I traveled to Alaska to teach. That's where it all started. We went to Puerto Rico; we went to Cuba a couple of times. We haven't stopped since.

### DESCRIBE CAFÉ RUMBA.

My late founder Marco and I decided to call it Rumba because we liked the

music and the environment of a party. We feature Peruvian-style sandwiches, made with sauces, marinades and peppers, and on weekends I also have traditional dishes such as ceviche, a citrus-marinated seafood dish that's emblematic of Peru, and *causa*, a layered potato dish stuffed with tuna, crabmeat or chicken. The homestyle food and service go hand in hand with the dancing and events we throw.

### WHY BELLINGHAM?

The cooking you can do anywhere, but the salsa scene wasn't as established. It's also right in the middle of two of our favorite cities, Seattle and Vancouver.

### WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT BELLINGHAM?

People here are hip. They're honest, they're aware of what goes on in the world, and they're really welcoming. There's a lot of hiking and outdoor activities, community events, arts and street festivals throughout the year. The quality of life is really high.

—ANNIKA HIPPLE