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## **Dance studio embodies family tradition**

*by Cari Merrill*

**Question:** What is Studio West Dance Center?

**Answer:** A full-service dance studio enrolling students ages 3 and up and providing dance instruction at all levels in ballet, tap, jazz, hip hop, lyrical, pointe and break dancing. To round out our repertoire, we are adding adult classes including yoga, Pilates, Mommy and Me, and stylized classes such as ballroom, salsa, tango, etc.

**Q:** Where did the name of the studio originate?

**A:** My favorite movie growing up was West Side Story. No matter what time of day West Side Story was on, I would watch and dance along. The movie has remained an inspiration all my life. When looking for a location and name for my new studio, I felt this location was true to my inspiration and an excellent and convenient choice for area families.

**Q:** What other services are offered?

**A:** We offer dance-related merchandise, personalized and professionalized dance instruction/consultation and attention to each family's personal needs.

**Q:** Do you have a target audience?

**A:** I truly believe in the importance of exposing all children and adults to the arts and nurturing this as a lifelong appreciation. We are dedicated to offering classes with a high standard of dance technique, style, artistry and performance. Developing a positive self-image physically and artistically in an innovative and fun atmosphere is our goal. Dance for life is our motto!

**Q:** How many students do you teach?

**A:** Based on this year's enrollment, we have more than 150 students ranging in age from 3 to 45.

**Q:** What sets your studio apart from others?

**A:** We offer combination classes. For example, ballet, tap and jazz as one class, which supports our philosophy on exposing students to a broader view of the art of dance without having to enroll in three separate classes. It is a family environment. If so inclined, families have room to stay, watch, read and let younger siblings explore the activity corner.

**Q:** Are you the only dance instructor?

**A:** We are a home-grown dance studio in every sense of the word, meaning I teach 98 percent of the classes and all of my assistants have grown up with me in the studio. I am very proud to say that I am not only their dance instructor but their mentor. In addition, Noel, my daughter, is one of the assistants. As the studio grows, it will continue to be a priority that as additional instructors are needed, they are representative of our philosophy, as in Laurel Goodman, who has done an awesome job teaching break dance for us.

**Q:** How long have you been dancing and how did you get started?

**A:** My mom realized that being the youngest of four girls who were already dancing at our local studio, there is no better time to start than at age 3, and as I say, you will never look that cute in a tutu again!

**Q:** What inspired your passion for dance?

**A:** Coming from a family that appreciated the arts, especially dance, my passion was nurtured and supported from as soon as I could walk. I was fortunate that my parents encouraged me to explore dancing. ... How cool is it for a child growing up to witness their parents at home bust a move regularly on Friday nights. Family dancing was a recurrent theme in my household.

**Q:** What is your favorite aspect of dancing and teaching it to others?

**A:** I find solace in the fact that the foundation of dance has been historically a part of civilizations for centuries. In this day and age, it is fulfilling to know that literally millions of people around the world are united in this passion. It is an honor to be able to pass on to others what I have had the pleasure of being a part of. My greatest reward would be for them to continue the tradition!

**Q:** What are the benefits of operating your own studio?

**A:** I feel today's society does not always provide an ongoing, hands-on experience for families to be a part of a common goal. By owning my own studio, not only can I operate within my own personal style and philosophy, but I can provide the opportunity for my family to learn what a dance studio/homegrown business is about. It is my hope that this experience is not only educational, but also one that they can draw on in future endeavors.



Sherri Barber/The Coloradoan

Jennifer Knostman, front and center, sashays across the floor as her students follow suit behind her as they learn a new dance during class. Knostman, who has been dancing for 35 years and teaching for 17 years, is the owner and instructor of Studio West Dance Center. The studio is a family-run business and offers a variety of programs.