

# Longtime dancer finds right step for vitality

By TODD WICKS  
STAFF WRITER

When she was 4 years old, Virginia Dickerman had to choose between taking piano or dance lessons.

Today, Dickerman, 77, is the tap dancing queen of Farmington. Her self-named studio has been successful for 38 years at its Orchard Lake location, where she has taught classes Monday through Saturday. Just this year, she ended her tradition of producing and performing a new dance recital/variety show annually for audiences in Novi and Clarenceville.

If that weren't enough, Dickerman also recently celebrated 10 years of hosting multiple dance and music shows on local cable Channel 12, with titles like "Dance with Virginia" and "Dickerman's Showcase."

Think she made the right choice?

"Everyone says, 'How can you do it, Virginia?'" said Dickerman. "They don't realize that dancing is so good for you. It's the exercise, and doing something I love to do, and passing on my knowledge."

Dickerman's dance career dates back to before the TV age, when she would appear in fashion shows and on billboards and magazines. She danced in productions across the country, and appeared in shows with vintage characters like the Green Hornet and the Lone Ranger.

Today, Dickerman is a breast cancer survivor and grandmother of two. Her students have gone on to work on projects from Broadway shows to episodes of "Baywatch."

While her official resume of productions is impressive, it is as a teacher that Dickerman truly shines. Herds of students swear by Dickerman's expertise and bubbly personality.

"She's one of those people who, if you're having a bad day, walks into a room and there's nothing bad about life, period," said Joan Nusly, owner of Framery One in Farmington Hills and a longtime Dickerman student. "She can make dance fun for people from



STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LANTIERI

Dance class: Dickerman's students have gone on to perform in Broadway musicals and on TV shows such as "Baywatch."

age 5 up into their 80s. Anyone who's had an opportunity to have Virginia in their life, it makes their life that much richer.

"She doesn't put on a big air like she's something special, and that is something special."

Mark Solis is a singer and dancer who has worked with Dickerman and performed in her recitals.

"I'm the only guy with about 10 or 11 gals (in my group)," he said. "We have a lot of fun. We laugh and learn at the same time. . . (She) will see what you're doing that shouldn't be, and will correct it by saying 'Let's change this.' And also will praise you when you do well."

Dickerman's expertise is in tap, but she is familiar with a variety of styles.

"The nice thing about being older is that I know all of the old dances, the buck and wing, an Irish jig, which is so popular now, just like 'Riverdance,'" she said. "So I try to pass on all my knowledge of all the dances I do."

"That's why I can't bear to retire yet, even though I'm getting to be an old lady and I should."

In an effort to cut down on her Herculean workload, Dickerman recently reduced her teaching

schedule to a few classes just for longtime dancing adults like Solis and Nusly.

Because tap is such a vintage dance style, Dickerman has to work at keeping it fresh and exciting. She spends free time attending dance workshops in New York and Hollywood with the Dance Masters of America, comparing and trading styles with other instructors.

"Tap dancing is a lot of very basic steps that are written up in lots of books," said Dickerman. "The only thing is, when you get your new music, your rock 'n' roll, you can update them. Put some hip-hop in it, when you're doing some jazz tap. There's so much lovely music to do things to. You have to keep up with what people are doing now."

There's still plenty of work ahead to keep Dickerman busy. Channel 12 has asked her to put together a children's dance show, and she has her remaining dance classes to prepare for, which begins in the fall.

"Heavens, I don't even think of stopping," said Dickerman. "I have lots of energy, and so I'm going to keep right on going until something tells me I can't."

"How's that?" she demanded with a laugh.



Plenty of kick: Virginia Dickerman, 77, believes dancing regularly has been the key to her youthful outlook on life.

## Local restaurants make the heart healthy grade

Six Farmington Hills restaurants made the honor roll of Heart Healthy Restaurants, according to a list recently released by the Oakland Heart Health Coalition.

Brady's Tavern, Clancy's Bar and Grill, House of Ing, Mayberry's Family Restaurant, Mitchell's Carry Out and Sunrise Cafe were the local establishments found to have the best variety of healthy food choices on their menus.

Taken under consideration was the availability of entrees with 30 percent or less fat, margarine or olive oil instead of butter, cholesterol-free egg substitutes, low-fat dressings, desserts, milk, low-fat substitutes for fried items, options of dressings/sauces served on the side, and foods prepared without salt.

The Oakland Heart Health Coalition urges positive lifestyle changes to reduce cardiovascular risk in Oakland County.

### Lawyers lend a hand

Michigan Trial Lawyers, based in Farmington Hills, was one of the Detroit-area organizations that participated in the Blitz Build program June 22-28.

Volunteers constructed 20 homes in seven days for area families in need of housing. An estimated 100,000 hours were donated toward the project.

The program, sponsored by Habitat of Humanity, allows the homes to be purchased on a no-interest loan. Instead of a down payment, each family invests 400 hours of "sweat equity," working with volunteers to build their new home.

Beanie go downtown  
Farmington-area shoppers now have a new Beanie Baby

outlet — Village Hidden Treasures, located in the lower level of the Village Mall at Farmington and Grand River.

"We're thrilled to have the opportunity to carry Ty Products, makers of Beanie Babies, as well as be exclusive sellers of Muffy VanderBear and Gene dolls and accessories by Ashton Drake," said owner Diane Cassidy.

Owner of the Village Clippers Hair Salon in the upper level of the mall for 12 years, Cassidy is a vintage doll collector. She wants her store to carry "special gift or collectible items (people) have been searching for."

Village Hidden Treasures will also carry Gund and Russ Berrie Plush Animals, Boyd Bears, Micro Trains, Classic Pooch and Mickey Mouse items.

Store hours are 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.

To celebrate its grand opening this month, special raffle drawings for three new items will be held each Saturday, along with free refreshments and balloons.

### Dads inspire authors

The Shirt Box in Farmington Hills recently held a contest, inviting kids to write essays on why their Dad or male role model was the best in the world.

The winner was Janet Daschovsky, 9, of Oak Park, who wrote the following:

"My dad is the best because he's mine. Because of my dad, my family came to the USA. My family came to the States from Russia because it was becoming bad there. My dad puts a smile on my face whenever I'm sad. I have reasons for loving him but no words."

### Chiropractic fund-raiser

Cromwell Family Chiropractic will raise funds for Farmington Families in Action during the Founders Festival from July 10-12. Dr. John Cromwell's staff will have two sidewalk booths across from the Village Shoe Inn

on Grand River, and will be holding a contest and pop sale to raise money.

It is important that people understand the tremendous effort that the Farmington Families in Action people are giving to raise our community awareness about the real drug issues facing us today," said Cromwell.

For more information on the fund-raiser or FFIA, call Cromwell at 477-1492 or the FFIA at (810) 851-8565.

### Dog behavioral seminars

Several new behavioral seminars for dog-owners will be held at the Trainer's Academy in Farmington Hills:

■ An Aggression Seminar will be given by Dave Gustner from 7-9 p.m. Friday, July 11. There is a \$10 fee for students, and \$19 for the public.

■ A TLC seminar will be given by Barb Bocci, from 7-9 p.m. Friday, July 25.

■ The complete series of seven Seminars will be presented by Dave Gustner from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 2, and from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 3.

■ A New Trainers' Seminar by Barb Bocci is a requirement for any new trainer.

The Trainer's Academy is located at Grand River and Halsted in Farmington Hills. There is a regular \$39 fee for those attending the seminars. Call (248) 616-8500 to register.

### Corvette raffle

A new 1997 Corvette and \$50,000 cash are the top prizes at the Corvette Raffle Country Hoodown Party, held from 6-9 p.m. on July 13 at the Cestick Center. The raffle is a fund-raiser to help underwrite the cost of the Founders Festival.

There will be food and entertainment, plus \$3,500 worth of other cash prizes. Odds of winning a cash prize are one in 100, but only 1,000 tickets will be sold. The drawing will be held at 3 p.m. July 13.

For details, call 474-3440.

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