

West Point bound



Donald Graham (right), 24872 Glen Orchard, Farmington Hills, is congratulated by U.S. Rep. William Brodhead (D-Detroit) on being named as a candidate to the West Point Military Academy. (Staff photo)

Donald Graham, 24872 Glen Orchard in Farmington Hills, has been appointed to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

Graham, a 1977 graduate of Farmington High School, was nominated by U.S. Rep. William Brodhead (D-Detroit), and was the only nominee offered an appointment to West Point from the 17th Congressional District, which includes Farmington, Farmington Hills, Southfield, Redford and parts of Detroit.

"The appointing process is a very selective one," says Anne Ogden, an aide to Brodhead.

"Each congressional district can nominate ten people to each service academy vacancy. Of the ten persons

we nominated for the Air Force Academy vacancies, only George Barbour of Redford and Terrence Foley of Detroit were offered appointments. Both have accepted," Ms. Ogden explains.

Of the nominations for West Point, only Graham was appointed.

"It's a very tough process. None of our Naval Academy nominees were offered appointments, on the basis of either medical or academic reasons," she concludes.

"Those who make it to the top are a select few."

A maximum of five candidates from each congressional district can be appointed to each of the three service academies.

Dancer taps to rhythms of the past

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

When the dance routines of the '30s and the '40s return, Virginia Lee Dickerman will be ready and waiting for them.

"I love them. Aren't they great?" she bubbled, demonstrating a few of Gene Kelley's steps in her cool Farmington dance studio.

From Gene Kelley's style she can slip into the toe-tapping mannerisms of Bill "Bo Jangles" Robinson or borrow a few of Fred Astaire's steps. Such footwork made Hollywood musicals survive in the small white dance studio on Grand River where Mrs. Dickerman has been passing them on to Farmington students for 19 years.

"Remember Bo Jangles Robinson dancing up the stairs with Shirley Temple?" she asks over her shoulder as she prepares to tap her way up a flight of imaginary steps while watching his style in the studio's full-length mirrors. That style has helped her through Detroit radio shows of the '30s and '40s as well as in modeling stunts for clothing and car manufacturers.

She's been making sure that she'll step perfectly almost all her life.

"WHEN I WAS FOUR YEARS old I took natural dancing. We wore bathing suits and held scarves and had bare feet. My mother wanted to know if I wanted piano lessons or dancing lessons. I wanted dancing instead of piano. My sister took piano," she remembered, with a nod of her auburn hair as she sat in her white-painted living room.

From there, she moved to ballet, tap, acrobatics, ballroom dancing and a touch of choreography. Dancing started to become a lifestyle instead of a hobby.

"I've been studying dancing all my life. I have a most diversified background," she said.

Her urge to dance can manifest itself at the drop of a note from the Muzak machine in her dentist's office.

"Sometimes I'll be sitting in my dentist's office and I'll hear some music and I'll think, 'wouldn't that make a nice dance?' and I'll start to choreograph it in the office," she said, laughing a little at herself.

So, before the microphone and clicked away to the orchestra's accompaniment.

After radio, she graduated to modeling new cars and costly furs. Dancing helped her show the products off.

Mrs. Dickerman broke into show business in 1935—but not exactly as a dancer. She was a member of the James Jewell Players on WXYZ radio's Junior Matinee.

SOMETIMES THE GROUP OF TEENS was called in to a neighboring studio to provide crowd noises for such shows as "The Lone Ranger" or "The Green Hornet."

"We'd say things like 'oh, look, here they come.' During the crowds scenes they'd tell us to talk crazy. We'd say 'spinach, spinach, hello, hello' and it would sound like a crowd muttering," she said.

She graduated to variety shows when she auditioned for and won a place as a dancer on Johnny Desmond's radio show.

Tap dancing on radio required a few special tricks. To get the idea across to the audience, the show needed dancer who could enunciate well with her tap shoes.

"My taps were the clearest of all," she said, with obvious pride at the memory. "And I could do stop timing too."

Stop timing was her spot for short spots while the band stopped playing for a few bars and let her take the stage. To get her taps nice and clear, she danced on a tap board, a series of folding linoleum panels.

"And they would introduce me by saying, 'Now here's Virginia Lee—the next Eleanor Powell,'" she added.

Tap dancing on radio allowed room to experiment, too. One day while goofing off before the show, she added a new trick to her repertoire.

"I WAS TAP DANCING with my tongue," she explained, giving a short demonstration of the sound effect. "And the producer said 'you're going to do that on the show, Virginia. It'll make a great novelty spot.'"

So, before the microphone and clicked away to the orchestra's accompaniment.

After radio, she graduated to modeling new cars and costly furs. Dancing helped her show the products off.

"Because I was a dancer I had a graceful walk," she said, demonstrating a style that has stayed with her.

One of her modeling assignments required a body guard.

"I was modeling an albino mink at Saks and I had a body guard with me in the store. A model in Chicago had been modeling a mink and she's been taken along with the coat. And the coat I was wearing cost about \$33,000," she remembered.

Showmanship is part of modeling clothes, too. Sometimes the clothes would be too large for her, so she'd push the excess material to the back when she was facing the client and reverse the process when she turned.

"That way they could see how the dress would look on them. This was before the clothing stores had racks," she said, pushing away imaginary material with her hands on her hips.

DURING TELEVISION'S heyday in the '50s, she helped push a national brand of turkey noodle soup by play-

ing a housewife in a supermarket. Of course, she raved about the soup.

About 25 years ago, she decided to teach dancing. Today, she coordinates classes, students, costumes and recital rehearsals from her Farmington studio. In the long blue and white wall-papered room, rows of pictures of former students smile down at her as she practices alone in the summer afternoon. Street noises filter in through the open back door as she taps through a routine. It's a far cry from her parents' basement where at age 13 she taught dancing at 10 cents a lesson to help her family through the Depression.

Now, she teaches her students the good old steps between September and June, with the help of her daughter Marcia. Her secret to enjoying her career throughout the years is relatively simple:

"You have to like children. You can know how to dance but you need patience and you have to like children to teach."

Antiques abound at RenCen Plaza

July, for some, is a month of barbecues, fireworks and Sol's rays. For others, it's a month for finally getting around to cleaning windows, perhaps some indoor outdoor house painting, and maybe sprucing up the landscape around the settlements.

If you've got the clean-up, paint-up, fix-up urge, an antique show at Detroit's Renaissance Center Plaza may be of interest.

Detroit Plaza Antique and Collectibles Show-Sale in the Ontario Room of the Plaza is set for July 22-24.

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