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Lorraine McClish editor/477-5450



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Necessary technique

Ballet furnishes finishing touch for the gymnast in competition

By Lorraine McClish
staff writer

Pamela Eldred-Levy and Margie Chambers opened a dance studio within Farmington Gymnastics Center as a concession to the gymnasts, with accent on ballet. Then stretched the classes to include tap and jazz dance lessons, and are now opening up the classes to all comers.

All of the dance classes have been scheduled back-to-back so students from the tiniest tumbler to the teen in competition can take two classes on a one-stop visit. And many of the classes for youngsters are scheduled simultaneously with aerobic or workout sessions for their mothers to fill in that waiting time.

"The gymnasts take ballet somewhere along the way. They need that technique for the floor routines, the arm movements, the body lines. If they don't point their toes correctly in a jump, that's points off. And it's not only artistic, but a prevention from bodily injuries as well," said Eldred-Levy, who teaches the ballet classes.

"All of the (gymnastics) winners have a dance background. It's their finishing touch, their polish," she added.

"Ballet was the natural first addition to the center and we had a built-in group of students from the gym classes who wanted more classes last fall," Chambers said, who teaches gymnastics as well as tap and jazz students. "We have a new teacher coming in for our next series to expand the schedule for those who want to take lessons here, whether or not they're enrolled in the gym classes."

ELDRED-LEVY and Chambers teamed up to form the dance classes after meeting one another while Eldred-Levy and her daughter Hilary were attending Chambers' Mom & Tot classes.

The two echo one another's philosophies on the value of developing the motor skills of the child at an early age.

"Dancing, exercise, gymnastics, all help develop coordination which gives self-assurance and makes learning much easier in all other things you tackle," Eldred-Levy said.

"It's a boost of confidence for the child and it makes for better coordination which is at the top of the list for both the dancer and the gymnast, and which of course spreads over into all other areas of your life," Chambers said.

Eldred-Levy has been dancing since she was four years old and used her talent in classical ballet to help her win the Miss America title 15 years ago.

Her minor in college was dance and she has studied Russian ballet and the Cecchetti technique of the dance which she uses in her teaching in Farmington Gymnastics Center. She studied with American Ballet Theatre in New York and danced professionally with regional companies.

She calls ballet "the total discipline."

Chambers has a degree in biology, and physical education with accent on dance, and has been teacher with Farmington Gymnastics Center for four years.

Both teachers stress the importance of teachers being knowledgeable about anatomy and being aware of not pushing a body further than it is capable of going.

GYMNASTICS remain the most popular sport for females in the U.S. The sport took that spot almost immediately after Olga Korbut from the U.S.S.R. came on the TV screens in 1976. Then Nadia Comaneci and Mary Lou Retton, Olympic medalists-turned-international celebrities, kept the sport

in that same top spot.

Dana Spencer, a graduate of North Farmington High School when the school took the state championship in gymnastics in 1982, opened Farmington Gymnastics Center, at 24715 Creveline Court, when the big surge of three-year-olds started coming into the gym.

"He's had a few state and regional winners in his classes, but says winning a gold medal is not necessarily the goal.

"Each kid is different and each comes for different reasons, so each is treated differently," he said. "We have some whose eye is on a gold medal. We have some who come for fun and games."

Even so, four-year-olds can choose, if they are deemed ready by their teachers, for competition in The Rainbow League.

"It's really competing against yourself. It's a way of getting used to competition, learning what it's all about, a practice before the real thing," said Beth Divens, speaking of the 4- to 6-year-olds who make up The Rainbow League.

As the competitive teams have grown and expanded, Spencer is expanding the center, with the dance classes, the aerobics for adults, and next, a full schedule of Indo classes.

Free brochures listing the entire schedule will be sent on request by calling the gymnastics center at 478-5130.



Dana Cesnik gets an assist from her teacher, Lindsay Richards (at left), in the tumbling class for preschoolers, which along with gymnastics training, remains the mainstay for Farmington Gymnastics Center. The ballet class (below) taught by Pamela Eldred-Levy was added to the center's schedule just recently as a convenience for the gymnasts who wanted the finishing touches of ballet added to their technique. Since then, tap and jazz classes have been added and are open to all youths, whether they are enrolled in the gymnastics classes or not.



Staff photos by Randy Borst



Two-year-old Casi Goshorn waits with her mother, Andrea, for the next class to start. Many of the mothers fill in that waiting time with aerobics or physical fitness workouts.

Lamaze Childbirth Association

Chapter celebrates breakthroughs, progress made in decade

By Marie McGee
staff writer

KAREN BAKER smiles when ever she sees the ad or hears the single trumpet sound of progress: "You've come a long way, baby."

Baker couldn't agree more. And in her case, the emphasis is definitely on the word baby.

For Baker and several hundred volunteers working with the Lamaze Childbirth Association of Livonia over the past 10 years, helping to spread the word about the natural childbirth method, it has a familiar ring.

Just how far the group has come in the past decade was the topic of discussion at a 10th-anniversary reunion at Baker's Farmington Hills home recently.

IT WAS ONLY natural that Baker's home be the site of the observance since the former Livonia resident is credited with organizing the Livonia chapter.

The inscription on a cake specially baked for the occasion summed it all up: "5,000-plus special deliveries be-

cause of 100-plus special people."

In reminiscing over the early days of the organization, which is part of an international group, the Livonia chapter volunteers recalled some of the progress that has been made over the years.

The biggest breakthrough has been in the area of attitudes and the acceptance of the method named after the French physician who developed a training program in natural childbirth, emphasizing breathing control and relaxation and the role of the father to bring these about.

It used to be, Baker recalled, "that if you want to have your baby and announced it would be by the Lamaze method, some nurses would say, 'Oh, one of those,' and put you off by yourself in some room to do your thing."

NOW, SAID BAKER, many nurses recognize the benefits of the Lamaze method and are actually very helpful and supportive to the woman who has chosen to have her baby that way.

"The change in the nurses' attitudes has made a considerable difference," said Baker.

Fathers' roles in the birthing experi-

ence have always been important, Baker notes. But it has become increasingly easier for them to participate in the birthing experience with the gradual lifting of hospital rules that outlawed dad to the waiting room while mom labored in the delivery room.

Some hospitals, Baker noted, now actually allow fathers to participate in the birthing experience, allowing them to cut the umbilical cord and children are allowed to see and hold the baby in some hospitals as part of a family "bonding" experience that draws the family unit together.

TEN YEARS AGO that was unheard of, she said. Now the "radical" is becoming the norm, she believes.

Interestingly, fathers continue to be the natural childbirth program's biggest boosters, agreed Baker and Therese Marshall, current president of the Livonia chapter.

"Women come to the first class curious and fearful and they usually have to drag their husbands along. But after the baby is born, fathers become our biggest boosters," said Baker.

"We've had them call us after the birth and tell us it was the best thing

that ever happened to them," added Marshall.

The number of doctors willing to practice the Lamaze method has also risen significantly over the years, Baker pointed out.

But as in any battle, you win some and you lose some.

For the Lamaze followers, the big win in the educational battle has been overshadowed somewhat by the competition for members now coming from doctors and hospitals who have actively gone into the field of health care classes.

"THEY JUMPED ON the bandwagon about three years ago," said Baker.

"When we started out," Baker recalled, "there were hardly any Lamaze groups in the area. That's why I got involved."

Now, she said, there are at least seven local groups that are independent of doctors or hospitals. But the biggest competition for members comes from doctors and hospitals who now conduct birth classes themselves.

Please turn to Page 4



Therese Marshall (at left) and Karen Baker have seen a lot of changes in the attitudes of families, doctors and nurses toward the Lamaze natural childbirth method in the last decade. Baker formed the chapter when she lived in Livonia 10 years ago, and is now a resident of Farmington Hills.