

Nadanta

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But Thacker hopes audiences see more than ethnic dance in lavish costumes.

"I want them to see the dance company as a dance company, committed to dance. Yes, we are from India, but that's not our only message. I want to be a part of the dance community. We have made a commitment as dancers and actors."

Thacker, who holds an undergraduate degree in microbiology, grew up dancing, the daughter of a mother who sang and a father who loved music.

"Three generations in my family went to the same institute of music and dance," she noted. "I got a degree from dance school. It was a deep study in dance."

Thacker practiced and now teaches Bharat Natyam, one of the seven classical styles of Indian dance. Each style differs in geographic origin, costume, hand gesture and foot work. Bharat Natyam came from southern Indian temples where practitioners danced as a form of worship.

Building a foundation

Thacker's students train in Bharat Natyam, building a foundation in proper Indian dance technique that enables them to stay "focused and flexible."

"They can learn folk dances in literally no time," Thacker said.

Rutvee Basrai, 17, a Troy High School student and a member of Nadanta's ensemble,

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Chaula Thacker
Choreographer

prefers classical dance.

"We have specific hand gestures we use. There are nine different expressions and structured eye movements and head movements," she explained. "It's fun. It gives you a way to express yourself differently."

Like ballerinas, classical Indian dancers learn distinct foot

and body movements, including the deep knee bends known as plie in ballet.

Thacker took ballet classes after moving to the United States with her husband in 1977. She also taught dance workshops at several colleges and took on a part time faculty position at Oakland University.

She founded Nadanta as a dance institute and non-profit cultural organization in 1980, earning support from the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs, Southfield Parks and Recreation and The Council of Asian Pacific Americans co-sponsor the group.

Touring group

Thacker also organized the performing ensemble as a touring group. Members have performed in Moscow, Leningrad and Copenhagen. They've appeared at the Detroit Festival of the Arts, at community festivals and for cultural diversity events.

Although most Nadanta mem-

bers claim some Indian ethnic heritage, a few are non-Indians who simply love dancing.

Cynthia Massenberg of Novi, who also performs with a Flamenco dance troupe, says the Bharat Natyam sharpened and improved her Flamenco technique.

Victoria Chohade of White Lake tried a few classes after her blonde-haired daughter, Kahlia, 8, began studying with Thacker.

"They have 27 finger positions you have to learn. Just being able to do the hand and arm movements at the same time and add eye movements really centers you," Chohade said. "It's such an old dance. It enlivens the spirit."

Center

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out southeastern Michigan Friday toured the building, which has expanded from 9,000 to 110,000 square feet. A free, 32-hour public open house brought thousands to the center last weekend to try hands-on displays in six different exhibit areas, see guest performers and watch *Journey into Amazing Caves* at the IMAX Dome Theatre.

Patrons, braving a blazing sun and humid, hot temperatures, waited for admission in lines that stretched along John R and Farnsworth each day of the celebration. They sipped juice and pop, munching snacks and lis-

tened to music wafting from the adjacent parking lot, which had taken on a festive atmosphere with food, art and information booths.

Members who attended the preview party found no lines outside the building, but queued at the mashed potato, beef, hot dog, salad and dessert bars that dotted the events lobby.

Appetite for science

Dan and Palma Pouratt of Farmington Hills, who renew their membership every year, said the center helps feed their son and daughter's appetites for science.

"The kids like it," Dan said. "And we've gone to other science centers with this membership when we've traveled."

"It opens doors to places other cities that you probably wouldn't visit otherwise," his wife agreed. "Their eight-year-old son, Nathan, described the refurbished center as 'cool.'"

"I like it all," he said.

His parents gave the renovation a thumbs up, too.

"It's a whole lot more colorful here," his father said. "Before it was kind of drab."

Missed the opening week

hoopla?

Don't worry. You'll find lots of color, activity and hands-on fun during the center's regular operating hours:

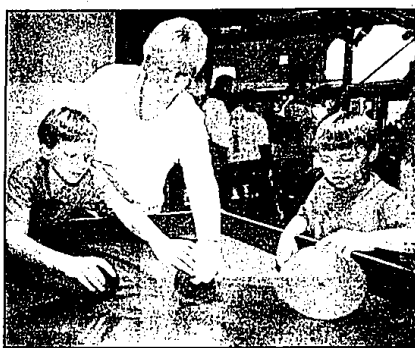
Activities

Journey into Amazing Caves takes viewers on a cinematic journey into underground vaults, labyrinths of ice and unmapped chambers with expedition leaders Dr. Hazel Burton and Nancy Aulend. The film, shown on the 3 1/2-story IMAX Dome Theatre screen, runs hourly from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Fridays, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Saturdays and noon-4 p.m. Sundays.

Preschoolers can strengthen their motor skills on science-related play equipment in the Ameritech Children's Gallery.

In the General Motors Motion Laboratory, visitors can demonstrate aerodynamics by operating a model airplane encased in a wind tunnel. Or they can crank gears, lift a 1,000 pound block with a lever and reassemble household items into different objects, among other activities.

Sound a drum set, play a laser harp, reflect, refract and scatter light through learning displays in the Waves and Vibrations Laboratory.



STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZILITNER

Playing with science: Rochester residents Derek Wood, 10, (left) and his friend, Jaime Geddes, 7, spin disks at an exhibit about motion. Derek's mom, Catherine Waller, accompanied the boys to a members' preview night at the New Detroit Science Center.

Life Sciences Laboratory houses an interactive waterfall that cascades three stories, rain forest displays and a demonstration area.

Visitors see lightning bolts

and other electrical phenomena during Sparks Theater demonstrations, in the Matter and Energy Laboratory. Hands-on exhibits include a wind turbine, hot air balloon and tornado chamber.

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Images: (Clockwise from top left) Robert R. Taylor, 1940s; (Clockwise from top right) Robert R. Taylor, 1940s; (Clockwise from bottom left) Robert R. Taylor, 1940s; (Clockwise from bottom right) Robert R. Taylor, 1940s.

The exhibition is organized by the Annetta Museum and Center for African American History and Culture, Smithsonian Institution, and is circulated by Curatorial Assistance, Los Angeles, California. In Detroit, the exhibition is sponsored by Ameritech/NSBC Global Network. Additional support has been provided by the Friends of African and African American Art, the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and the City of Detroit. Media sponsor is MIX 92.3 WABC.

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