

Suburban Life

Loraine McClish editor/477-5450



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Annette & Co.

Dance teacher creates a positive attitude and a joyful noise

By Louise Okrusky
special writer

Stretched across three store fronts in Farmington Hills, Annette Bergasse's dance studio reverberates with joyful noise.

Close your eyes and you could swear Annette & Co.'s entire enrollment of 911 students and their parents fill the rooms. Students dance, laugh, play, talk. There's music in this mix, too. A pop tune's insistent rhythm drives an advanced tap class.

Bergasse, 44, is a petite woman who seems to thrive on this sort of controlled confusion.

"The atmosphere and the key here is that this is home. The school I grew up in had a competitive factor that was negative," she said. "Everyone cheers each other on, here. I want to bring out the best instead of negativism."

Optimism mixed with a dollop of ambition have taken her from giving classes in her Oak Park basement to a 5,000 square foot studio. Enrollment is recorded on the studio's computer system. For busy parents, there's a corner of Annette & Co. devoted to selling dance wear and t-shirts with the studio logo.

BORN IN A displaced persons camp in southern Italy, Bergasse came to the U.S. with her parents on a military ship. Hers is the classic immigrant's tale of hard work, luck and parental devotion.

"My parents worked day and night but I had dance classes."

At 11, she was asked to be an apprentice at her teacher's studio. Es-

entially it was a go-fer job. "But it was the greatest moment," she says. She worked hard enough to earn a dance scholarship to Wayne State University. While a member of the Court Players Co., the old resident company of the Detroit Institute of Arts, she auditioned in New York for a role in "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown." Ten days later, a telegram arrived telling her she was an understudy for the role of Lucy.

"I was training my whole life for a career on stage," she said. She grabbed her chance and proceeded to a career in off-broadway productions and college tours.

She may not have been a star but she was successful enough to say, "I never starved."

Non dancing parts also came her way. She won a small role in a forgotten movie, "Giant Step." Then she decided to settle down and devote herself to raising her two sons, Josh, now 17 and Mark, now 13.

"I never encouraged the boys to become dancers," she says. "One thing I did do. I invited them to spend time in the studio. Instead of a babysitter, I took them to the office. As it turned out they wanted to take class. It's never been pushed."

One afternoon, she noticed her son, Josh and a friend peering through her basement studio's window, watching a class in session.

"We looked through the window and my mom was waving to us. 'Come here, come here,' Josh said. 'I kept going and I never wanted to quit.'"

Both of her sons study dance. Mark's an apprentice teacher at the school. Josh and three other 17 and



Annette Bergasse teaches dance, along with teaching the values of accentuating the positive in an atmosphere filled with laughing, playing, talking and music.

18-year-old students were chosen to dance for an international hair stylists show during a weekend in late October at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City.

ALTHOUGH her top students perform at events and local charities

around town, the Waldorf booking came as a surprise. Nick Slagkris of Rumors hair salon in West Bloomfield asked Bergasse to choreograph the show built around a tribute to Frank Sinatra's 50-year career.

She managed to convince Slagkris to take a chance on her four students

instead of hiring New York based dancers. All four teach at the studio.

"He had faith in the kids," she says of Slagkris.

Each of her young dancers balance school work with long hours at the studio. So far most of them ha-

ven't settled on dancing as their sole livelihood.

Ryan Quinn, 17, one of the dancers scheduled for New York, began taking lessons from Bergasse 10 years ago.

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SHARON LeMIEUX/staff photographer

Tuesday night is rehearsal night for Farmington Community Chorus and its new director Steven SeGraves.

Community chorus

New director wields baton for singers

By Debbie L. Sklar
special writer

Steven SeGraves, the new conductor of the Farmington Community Chorus, decided to take a leave of absence from his old job so he could go back to school and hit the books.

SeGraves, 28, a resident of Clawson, says "I decided after three years of teaching at Chippewa Valley High School, it was time to go back and get my master's degree. He is now attending Oakland Uni-



Steven SeGraves

versity in Rochester where he is working on his master's degree in composition. "I just feel like it was time to go back to school and get my master's," he says. "My ultimate goal is to teach at a community college, university or college level."

In the meantime, besides hitting the school books, SeGraves is the conductor for the Farmington Hills Chorus — a job that keeps him pretty busy.

"The people I work with are really terrific," he says. "They are all very talented. It's a lot different than working at a high school where the students seem to be less disciplined — at times I felt like I was having to act like their extended parent."

SeGraves grew up in Jackson, graduated from Jackson High School and continued his education at Wayne State University where he earned a bachelor's degree in Music Education in 1980.

"My years at WSU were really very rewarding," he says with a genuine feeling of sincerity in his voice. "I was in the Men's Glee Club and part of the Chamber Singers. I sang under Harry Langford who was

amazing — I even toured Europe with the group and we won two world championships. The contest was the oldest musical competition in the world. It was held in Wales and we won in both 1981 and 1985 for the best Men's Chorus."

SeGraves says he is an instrumentalist and plays percussions.

In his spare time SeGraves says he enjoys tennis, volleyball and racquetball. He also likes reading fiction and writing music. "I like to compose when I have extra time," he says. "I enjoy it immensely because it relaxes me and lets me express myself. It's hard though because sometimes I can't get an idea, but other times I can't seem to write it down fast enough — basically you never know when the bug is going to hit you."

In regards to his new position with the Farmington Community Chorus, SeGraves says he finds it very fulfilling.

The group of 85 meets in North Farmington High School on a weekly

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