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"I had to practice eight hours a day, seven days a week all summer to achieve this title, but it was worth it," Svoboda said. "My goal now is to become the Majorette Queen of America (DMA's top honor) when I am 16."

Svoboda, who has been a student of Skarvi for eight years, won the Little Majorette Princess of America title in the elite division when she was 10 years old. The next year, at age 11, she won the Petite Majorette Princess of America, also in the elite division.

Other local winners in the DMA competition are Jessica Carps, 12, of Farmington Hills, a seventh grader at East Middle School, and Kami Laura, 9, a fifth grade student at Marshall Elementary School in Livonia. Both won the Intermediate Debutante Princess title, Jessica for the 11-12 age group, Kami for ages 9-10.

According to Skarvi, twirlers compete according to their ability and age with beginner being the lowest skills level, then intermediate, advanced and elite. This successful teacher reached the ultimate level herself in 1989 while a student at Michigan State University when she won the title of Majorette Queen of America.

A former gymnast, Skarvi switched to baton twirling when she was 13.

"I didn't have the upper body strength to continue in gymnastics, so I selected twirling because it made use of many of my skills. And I had already established good practice habits. It was a good switch."

Mickey Skarvi, Derek's mother and a teacher in the Clarenceville District, assists her daughter with the 25 baton students.

"My mother used to be a baton twirler and taught the sport. I'm lucky to have her expertise and support," Derek Skarvi said.

"I really love teaching baton. It is a great sport that combines

gymnastics, dancing and modeling. It is one of the safest sports (although it can result in muscle strains, broken fingers and blisters), but it does require lots of practice to achieve success."

Practice is what helped Jessica and Kami to win their national titles. Jessica spent up to 18 hours a week practicing this summer, while Kami, who has been taking baton for just two years, spent six to seven hours a day fine-tuning her skill.

"It takes dedication and hard work to win," says the students. "And it requires having a good teacher, like Derek."

In addition to teaching baton at OCC and through the Clarenceville Community Education program, Skarvi is a student in the sports medicine program at Wayne State University. Her goal is to become a trainer and/or a sports team rehabilitator.

This football season is Skarvi's last of twirling for the Detroit Lions. "After 10 years of doing this (she started when she was a junior in high school), I decided it's time to give others a chance," she said.

According to Skarvi, no matter what she does in the future, her life will include teaching baton twirling. "I enjoy watching my students advance and knowing that I have had a small part in their success," she said.



GUY WARREN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Showing her stuff: Twirler Jessica Carps, 12, of Farmington Hills, right, puts on some moves for instructor Derek Skarvi.

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