

HERO'S Corner



For more than 30 years, the Maryland Youth Ballet (MYB) in Silver Spring, Md., has been instructing children and adults in the art of dance and producing some of the country's most illustrious dancers.

Of the 1,500 students who pass through MYB's doors each year, there is a group of children who are breaking barriers to dance and moving themselves, others, and the dance company in new directions.

Jennifer Cox is a much-loved teacher at the school and mother of a prima ballerina. She also is grandmother to twin girls, one of whom has cerebral palsy. Her desire to share the family's love of dance prompted her to create a "Music in Motion" dance class in which her granddaughter and a group of other children with special needs are supported by teenage dancers as they move their arms, kick their legs, and walk assisted to live piano music.

"For three years that was the class," explains Marc Lieber, MYB board member. Then, in 2006 the organization received a grant and physical therapist Rebecca Leonard conceived of how a partial weight-bearing system could be applied to a dance environment. Cox and Leonard asked Marc to research how MYB could use a weight-suspension system to give the children greater independence to dance more freely.

Marc learned of a company that manufactured transfer devices used in hospitals. The company modified its design with a system of straps and tracks to support six students at a time.

Today, there are two Music in Motion classes for 14 dancers with special needs. Some dancers are ambulatory, others are not. Each child is suspended from the track system in spring-loaded straps. When the piano music begins, the dancer walks, hops, changes directions, moves sideways, spins . . . and dances . . . unassisted.

"I am pleased with how the harness allows the children to exercise in the upright position and frees up their movement," says Rebecca.

For Marc, his involvement with the project has been life affirming. "If I'm ever asked about a meaningful contribution I have made in my life, I will point to this class at the Maryland Youth Ballet."

Addendum to Winter 2007 "Hero's Corner" article

Remember Dr. Roger Wolcott from the "Hero's Corner" article in the Winter issue?

Connecting's editorial team learned that he also helped make someone's dream come true with the help of the Make-a-Wish Foundation. For the patient, appearing on the "Orange County Choppers" television program was a lifetime highlight. Great work, Dr. Wolcott. You are a true inspiration.