



photos by Dave Minnick

# ELITE DANCE STUDIO

by Robin Minnick

The lobby of the squat brick building is sparse and oddly free of dance-bag clutter. Trophies, one nearly six feet tall, cluster in a corner like a grove of metal trees. On entering, visitors see a large classroom to the left, another across the lobby, and a third in back. Dance tees on display with a knot of women surrounding a central counter. One is a petite blonde-haired woman with bright eyes and a sweet smile and a dream five times bigger than she is. Victoria Armstrong, is the Owner/Artistic Director of Elite Dance Center near the corner of Legion and Black-and-Decker Roads.

It's a cliché: little girls dreaming of being ballerinas. However, some girls - like Victoria - dream of teaching dance and owning their own studios.

Victoria has been teaching locally since she was a teenager. When she graduated from South View High School, she went on to study in New York, where she also worked at Encore Dance Academy in Kings Park, Long Island.

Inspired by many of her dance teachers, she found a real mentor in the Academy's director, Kelly Komorowski. Kelly advanced Victoria through teaching classes to become her assistant, then pushed Victoria out of the nest to return to Fayetteville.

Victoria co-owns Elite Dance Center with entrepreneur Teresa View. Their combined experience as dancer, teacher, businessperson, and dance mom allows them to develop practices based on the best of what they have seen. Only four months into their second year, they have enrolled the same number of students they finished with last year, 349.

Victoria's mother and both owners' husbands are directly involved in the Center. The dance parents have become family, too, pitching in when students need attention or phones need answering. One parent acts as medical advisor, consulting about dancers' health and handling emergencies.

The Center employs nine teachers encompassing 90 years of experience. Some have taught for 20 years, others one or two. Victoria prefers hiring teachers that she knows from direct contact can teach children, selecting them based on observation, experience, and success.



“Girls are here for a lot of different reasons, including socializing,” says Victoria. “Some are grooming to be teachers; some are grooming to be performers. It’s a-ok if they are here primarily to socialize. People come here because it’s a family.”

While recreational and competition students perform together at events and in recital, their classes are separate. Recreational students get full attention in their classes, and both sides feel they receive equal treatment. Everyone gets a chance to shine. Elite’s recital, held at Crown Coliseum, is all about the recreational dancers.

Older competition dancers assist with recreational classes. Victoria and Teresa are particular in what they expect from the students. They are “100% expected to be role models” and to exhibit good behavior and work ethics.

“We take an active interest in their welfare,” says Victoria. They must keep up their grades and conduct themselves appropriately. When dancers wear the Elite T-shirt, they know they are representing the Center.

Team members audition for and perform as

the Heart of Christmas Dancers. The annual fundraising event is important to Victoria. She danced with Heart of Christmas from the age of 13; now, she is passing that tradition along to “her kids.” Performing in parades, fundraisers, and private events lets the students give back to the community. It’s an important part of the Center’s philosophy.

Teresa says, “I want them to understand what hard work, dedication and giving back feels like.”

Victoria says her goal for her students is “letting them see the breadth of what can come of this. I want to show them, don’t hold yourself back because you’re not in a large city. Don’t let yourself be held back because you’re starting in a little military town. You can still do something big.”

People have different ideas of what ‘big’ means. Dancing in New York was wonderful, but more important to her is something she brought back; Diamond Dancers, a program inspired by her mentor, Kelly Komorowski. Children with special needs may take tuition-free classes at the Center. Diamond Dancers are exposed to dance in a loving, secure atmosphere and are taught according to their ability.

When parents first visit the Center, Victoria shares what dance has done for her, how it motivated and shaped her. No matter what happened in her life, she could always go back to dance. She hopes her students will feel the same.

As dancers come through the lobby, they call out to Victoria, eagerness for her attention lighting their faces. The respect, the joy, the love for dance, the sense of family seems to be rampant at the Center. These qualities are what elevate the Center, what make it truly ‘Elite.’

~ ARRAY ~

