

Award Winning Faculty at *Denise Lester Dance Academy*

In 1972 at the age of 17, Denise Lester, along with the help of her family, started the "Denise Lester Dance Academy" (DLDA). She would never have guessed that, in her parent's basement, with five students, in what was the small town of Pickering that she could have started what is now, 35 years later, so successful, and whose alumni are currently performing, choreographing, and teaching all across Canada and the U.S.

What is the secret to this success? "The teachers" says Denise. "A dance studio is only as good as the ability of its teaching staff. It is our teachers who create the friendly atmosphere that makes it easier for the children to learn."

Denise started teaching at age 14, when her teacher became sick and she helped out at the studio. When she was 16, she received her first qualification as a teacher in tap and became a member of the B.A.T.D. Denise now holds a full life membership in Ballet, Tap, Jazz and Modern. She is a founding member of BATD competition and sits on the Internal Committee Board for the Toronto district.

"For 18 years Canada's Wonderland produced a large dance show for the park. Our dancers were hired every year. A record unprecedented by any other dance studio in Ontario," proclaims Denise. Every year students of the DLDA complete their teaching qualifications and many of them have opened dance studios or teach for other studios. A large percentage of the dance teachers now teaching in Pickering/Ajax are alumni's of Denise's, a fact that she is very proud of. "At a recent dance competition that we attended 13 out of the 23 dance teachers there were students on mine. It was one of my proudest moments," Denise explains.

Denise teaches and choreographs every age from three and up. Rarely is there a competitive year that she does not receive a choreographer's award. She has choreographed for La Senza, Brown's Shoes, the CNE, Eluck Productions, Sick Kids Foundation, Diabetes Association, Carol Forest Productions and the Eaton's Centre. "I love that these shows give my young students an opportunity to experience the professional stage," Denise says.

For the first 14 years of the DLDA, Denise was the only teacher. By this time her advanced students were now becoming qualified BATD teachers themselves. Denise chose the best and Suzie and Wendy became the first faculty members of the Denise Lester Dance Academy.

Suzie began her dance training at age three when she became one of the first students of the DLDA. Her talent was apparent right from the start. She competed in her first solo at age five and a mere 10 years later was one of the youngest dancers hired for Canada's Wonderland. From there Suzie's career skyrocketed. She danced for Wonderland for four years, two of those years as dance captain and has continued to choreograph, adjudicate and assist with their audition tour. Suzie choreographed the Wonderland Nickelodeon Parade last year and this year her work can be seen daily on the main stage in "Twistin to the 60's". She travelled and performed through out Northern Canada for the Canadian Armed Forces tour for Canadian troops and for the United Nations in Egypt, Cypress, Israel and Germany. Her television experience spans commercials, T.V. series and music videos, has been "Robin Wil-

liams" foot double in Death to Smoochie and has choreographed such greats as Aretha Franklin, the late James Brown, Erika Badu, John Goodman, Dan Akroyd and Wilson Pickett. Suzie has done industrials for Toyota, Sunoco, General Electric, Digital Electronics, and Word Book Encyclopedia. She was also a dancer for Shania Twain and Bobby Curtola.

Suzie is an unbelievable teacher who brings the best out in her students every time.



Rarely do Suzie's competitive routines not achieve overall high scores. She believes in giving the best class possible each and every week always adding new challenges. "My students work so hard for me. It touches my heart when I work with the kids and they give so much of themselves."

Wendy settled in Pickering at the age of 12 and began her formal dance training with Denise. This past year marked Wendy's 25th anniversary as a member of the DLDA. Wendy's talent shone through and she became a valued member of the studio's competitive team. Her competitive and examination successes were many — receiving overall high scoring awards at local and international competitions across Canada and the U.S.

She entered the professional field quite young, performing for Canada's Wonderland and the CNE. Wendy is still performing, and is a dancer for the "Viva Las Vega" show at the Old Scott House and for the "Newcomers Show". Wendy performed for the Auto Show, in South Pacific, go-go danced for Industrials and for the "Disco Knights" Disco band, was part of the Spirit Walk for Pickering Museum, a member of the Pelican Players and many functions for the city of Pickering. She performed and choreographed Fashion shows for Cougar Boots, the Women's Show, Weekenders, Food Expo and many Mall Promotions. She was also a judge for the Mini Miss Canada Pageant, worked with the North York Children's Opera, choreographed for La Senza and Lola and Quinn from Zoey 101.

Wendy is a passionate, fun loving teacher who takes great pride in the accomplishments of her students. Whether she is teaching a class for beginners, working with the youngest competitive dancers or the most advanced, her choreography is always inventive and entertaining. "I Love them all,"

she says. "It doesn't matter the age. When you see somebody trying a move week after week and then finally get it! It's a beautiful thing."

Shannon Bruce was another Denise Lester "baby" starting at the studio at the age of four. As a little girl it was her dream to teach for her studio, by the age of 16 her dream had come true. Now, 10 years later Shannon has students who now dream about being a teacher like her. She is a qualified BATD

teacher in Ballet, Tap, Modern and Acro. As a competitor she was unbeatable winning overall high scores time and time again. She qualified for the National All American Dance Invitational Tour in Hawaii, won Miss Dance Elite International, was the semi finalist of "Dancer of the Year" in Las Vegas and was starred three times for the BATD ballet scholarships.

Shannon continues to perform and choreograph professionally as well as teaching dance at DLDA, for other studios and in the school system. Her dance credits include performing for music icon Cher's end of tour party, four years at Canada's Wonderland, Epcott Centre, the Auto Show, the DuMaurier Tour, and Fashion Cares by Mac Cosmetics. She has worked for Vision Entertainment, Carol Forest Prod., Janet Wagner, Gwen Bloom, and Karen Eluck. She choreographed for Brown's Shoes, La Senza, Zoey 101, Sick Kids Hospital and a musical called Smile.

Shannon is a remarkable teacher who knows how to make every child feel like they belong in her class. "Dance class is to be enjoyed. I love to see the kids beaming faces as they bounce into the studio, excited about their class." Shannon's classes are fun and high energy, and her experience as an acro teacher is unmatched. There are a lot of dancers who have now achieved their aerials and back handsprings thanks to Shannon.

Tammy is of course another little girl whose mom brought her to the DLDA when she was three not realizing what an impact that decision would make in Tammy's life. Tammy's ballet has always been flawless, her exam results always an honour and she was starred for a ballet scholarship every year from grade three and up. Mix this beautiful technical ability with her strength as an acro dancer and you get a beautiful teacher for any lucky student to emulate. Tammy teaches all of the

Beginner and Junior Acro classes and has given many young dancers the technical base that they need to achieve the crowd pleasing tricks that Tammy is known for. She holds her qualifications in Ballet, Tap, Modern and Acro. Tammy has worked her way to her fifth year at York University by teaching for DLDA and many other Toronto area studios. She has performed for the Breast Cancer Foundation, the Toronto Zoo, Eluck Productions and for many Industrials. "I met most of my very close friends at dance class when I was a child and we continued to dance together until we went to University. Those are years that I will never forget. Now it is very cute when I watch my students making new friends in class," Tammy says.

Alvin started his dance training at age 16 when he started dating Suzie (now his wife and mother of his four children). He was a natural, he started competing one year and working professionally the next. He performed for the Sears fashion tour, PCS Plus in Montreal, Cougar fashions, Kinney fashions and the TD Bank. He danced for the televised NHL awards and Teen Beat Challenge. Alvin works a lot with the boys at the studio. Choreographing their hip-hop numbers and teaches the lift classes. Alvin is presently a Registered Massage Therapist, an Osteopath, Cranial Sacral therapist, Acupunctural and Nutritional consultant. He is the owner of the Centre for Healing and Personal Potential right here in Pickering. Dance is his passion "Dance is a large part of my life. It is engrained in my soul," Alvin says.

Brandi started as a student with Denise at the age of three and now, at 20, is the youngest member of the Denise Lester teaching staff. Last year Brandi's choreography consistently won first place and highest senior group of the competition twice. Since dance is a visual art a student will always dance with the same style as her teacher. Anyone who has seen Brandi dance would love to look just like her on stage. She has a beautiful breadth of motion, her extension is awe inspiring and her style so smooth.

Brandi's own competitive years found her to be unbeatable. She won high scoring solo and highest mark of the competition both as an amateur and as a professional, many times choreographing her own routines. She has been awarded "Miss Star Catcher" Outstanding Technique award, Best Emotional Execution, Adjudicators choice awards, and even Prom Queen and Miss Congeniality at her school prom. Brandi has performed in fashion shows, numerous industrials and as a soloist for the Sick Kids Hospital Foundation. She is currently a third year dance major at York University and is a qualified BATD teacher in Ballet, Tap, Modern and Acro. "I love the opportunities that dance has given to me. It has allowed me to work at something that I truly love to do," she says. "Helping our students achieve a goal is very rewarding."

Your child too could be taught by these wonderful teachers. The award winning creative staff of the Denise Lester Dance Academy would love the opportunity to share their love of dance with your child. The Denise Lester Dance Academy offers classes for children three years old and up, from beginner to advanced in Ballet, Pointe, Tap, Jazz, Modern, Pointe, Acro and Hip Hop. If you would like further information on the classes please call (905) 839-3041 or see their ad for opportunities to visit the studio.