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Chatham Dance Studio Wins National Honor

Performance by Jan's Dance Studio receives 'Performance Excellence Award' at dance convention

CHATHAM, Illinois -- A performance by dancers from Jan's Dance Studio of Chatham received the highest honor at the Mark of Excellence National Talent Competition held in July at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center in Fort Walton Beach, Florida against over 500 routines.

Thirteen dancers from Jan's Dance Studio, also known as JDS, competed in the "Senior Large Group" category, in a contemporary number called "Naeem." The performance won the Performance Excellence Award on July 13, 2021.

"Our dancers put all of their passion, technique, and emotion into that performance of 'Naeem,'" said Janet Regan Burghart, the co-owner and founder of JDS. "I am incredibly proud of them."

The Mark of Excellence Competition featured nearly twenty regional competitions around the country in the spring of 2021. Performances and dancers who scored high marks at these regional events were invited to appear at the national event in Florida.

"We knew we had an amazing group of senior dancers, but as soon as the event started, we were so impressed by the level of competition from hundreds of other numbers brought to Florida by dozens of studios from around the country," said Gretchen Burghart Bice, the co-owner of JDS. "Being recognized at a national event like this was amazingly special,

especially after a year of COVID-19 that was so challenging for our business, our students, and their families.”

The JDS students who performed in “Naaem” are: Lauren Calvin, Kaitlyn Claypool, Abigail Broomhead, Ilina Karri, Allie Cohoon, Gabi Halterman, Maya Tharp, Bella Hedge, Hannah Sterling, Abby Majka, Sophie Marsaglia, Hailey Bale, Madi Harris. The performance was choreographed by Christa Smutek, a dancer based in Michigan who has worked several times in the past with JDS and its competition company, the Dazzlers.

JDS took 46 routines and 43 dancers to compete at the Mark of Excellence, and seven groups were chosen to compete in the final day as the best of the best in running for the Performance Excellence Award. Of those, three received national titles -- “Think” for the teen small group, “Arrival” for the senior small group, and “Naaem” for senior large group before it went on to win the highest honor of the event. Earlier in the competition, JDS performances were honored for wins in their categories, for entertainment value, costumes, and choreography. Hannah Phillips, who serves as the coach of the Chatham Glenwood dance team, is also an instructor and main choreographer at JDS. Gretchen Burghart-Bice, Chloe Dinardo, Ellie Pfister, Jeana Smith, Lauren Calvin and Kaitlyn Claypool also all had choreography awarded at the event.

JDS was founded in 1985 by Regan Burghart, a Springfield native who danced through her childhood and teenage years with Betty Jo Mack. As a young woman, she performed professionally with troupes in Chicago and Texas before returning home and starting a family. Drawn back to dance as an adult, she launched JDS in a studio her husband Vic Burghart built for her in the basement of their home in Springfield. As the business attracted more students, she moved to a studio behind a bowling alley in Rochester, above a garage in Springfield, eventually settling in a building located off Route 4 in Chatham. JDS now occupies four studio spaces in two buildings and has more than 200 students.

Her youngest daughter, Gretchen Burghart Bice, became her partner and co-owner of the studio in 2011 after returning to central Illinois following a successful 10 year career in musical theater that included appearing in the Broadway First National Tours of “Fame” and “Legally Blonde: The Musical.” She holds a BFA in Musical Theater and Dance from Millikin University, where she was also an instructor of dance for several years before focusing solely on JDS.

JDS offers dance education for children from toddlers through young adulthood in ballet, jazz, tumbling, hip-hop, tap, lyrical and pointe. Its instructors are certified through the Chicago Association of Dance Masters, the Southern Association of Dance Masters and Acrobatic Arts.

The studio’s competition team, the Dazzlers, usually competes at four events a year in cities including Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, and Indianapolis. The studio also brings in professional dancers to offer master classes to students in Chatham, and students are encouraged to attend dance conventions with JDS to learn from other teachers. The studio has a recital in June of each year and students also perform at nursing homes during the holidays, the State Fair, First Night Springfield and other events.

JDS Alumni have built careers in the entertainment industry at Walt Disney World, on Broadway, on cruise ships and several have gone on to own dance studios! Alumni have been part of elite Division 1 dance teams with the University of Illinois’ Illinettes Dance Team and the Butler Bulldogs. Numerous are (or have) pursuing dance degrees in prestigious programs across the the US.

“Not all of the students who pass through our studio go on to build a career in dance, of course,” said Regan Burghart. “But exposure to the fine arts, and the family atmosphere we have at JDS, builds confidence, teaches discipline and encourages creative thinking. After 36 years, I’m grateful for each day that I get to spend my career surrounded by young people in a dance studio!”

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Photo 1- Full Group of Dancers

Row 1: L to R Grace Altman, Addison Marcordes, Makayla Liska, Brynna Armstrong

Row 2: Hannah Phillips, Lilly Davis, Fern Norris, Ryleigh Hurley, Taylor Welker, Lilliana Millburg, Alexis Moore, Kendall LeSeure, Emma Davis

Row 3: Taryn Matthews, Chloe Jones, Vivian Vo, Hailey Bale, Madi Harris, Kennedy Rentmeister, Mady Lowry, Lauren Humes, Brynn Brockmeyer, Kaylee Waganer, Abigail Broomhead, Madeline Roark

Row 4: Gretchen Burghart-Bice, Bella Hedge, Natalie Rebbe, Madeline Butkus, Kate Keller, Kaitlyn Claypool, Daylee Pickett, Sophie Marsaglia, Bella Halterman, Lauryn Jacoby, Abby Majka, Will Baird, Ella Schwartz, Ilina Karri, Alina Vogler, Hannah Sterling, Allie Cohoon, Lauren Calvin, Gabi Halterman, Maya Tharp, Janet Burghart

Photo 2

Row 1: L to R Maya Tharp, Hailey Balet, Sophie Marsaglia, Lauren Calvin, Kaitlyn Claypool, Abby Majka, Hannah Sterling

Row 2: Randy Kalis, Ella Schwartz, Gabi Halterman, Allie Cohoon, Madi Harris, Kate Keller, Abigail Broomhead, Ilina Karri, Bella Hedge, LaRon Higgins