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LA Stars dance team reaches for the stars

DAVE KEMPTON
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS STAR

Barbara McKenzie uses the terms strong technique, practice and dedication in describing her team preparing for a national competition in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina this summer.

McKenzie's team does not throw, run or hit any object. They dance.

The LA Stars are the competitive dancers at Footnotes Dance & Music in Lehigh Acres and the group of 25 elite dance members recently qualified one individual, four trios and a 24-member team for the nationals.

The LA Stars won 20 medals at the Showstopper Dance Championships in Orlando against dozens of teams from around Florida.

The team advances to the national finals July 3-8 at the Myrtle Beach, South Carolina Convention Center.

"They all have a strong commitment, you need a strong ballet technique, more

than the normal dancer," McKenzie said. "The gym class is a technique class, working on routines involving jazz, contemporary, tap and hip hop."

"They will spend six to eight hours a week in rehearsals," she said. "They're all competitive, very serious and intense. Two high school seniors, for example, were late to their prom because they worked here on routines."

McKenzie said most people can learn to dance but rhythm and timing are important.

"Honestly, some people have no rhythm and it's tougher for them to become a good dancer but for the most part if you're willing to work, you'll learn," she said.

"Myrtle Beach is like the dancing Olympics, we'll have 21 different teams or individuals making the journey, doing a large variety of different dances," she said.

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SPECIAL TO THE NEWS STAR
The LA Stars 12-14 team finished third in the competitive division recently at the Showstopper Dance Championships in Orlando.

Dance

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McKenzie, 43, has spent her entire life in Lehigh Acres, graduating from Riverdale High School and formerly Edison State College while dancing since age 4. She has been teaching and mentoring for 25 years.

"I thought about a teaching career when I was young but working with children in dancing became my passion," she said. "Our four children, ages four through 22, live at the studio."

McKenzie started at Footnotes part time, became a manager and purchased the business in 2006.

"I understood there was a void at that time and we could make the business grow," she said. "We even added on another room."

"Our dancers watch with great interest the dance competitions on TV, like Dancing with the Stars or Think You Can Dance," said McKenzie, whose husband Wayne Christano, recognized locally as a popular guitar player, heads the music

division of Footnotes.

"Wayne doesn't even dance, so we have no competition on the dance floor, so he spends all of his time with the guitar," said McKenzie.

Footnotes Dance & Music instructs over 220 students, preparing for local competitions or recitals. The staff includes four music teacher and 10 dance instructors.

The lone LA Stars individual to qualify for the nationals was Kiara Bussey, whose "Old English" number finished second in the Senior 15-19 Solo. Two other senior teams (15-19) finished fifth and 10th in the Competitive Division.

The Lehigh Acres trio of Sierra Ortiz, Lily Christano and Chloe DuBose placed fourth in the Advance 8 Under division, dancing to "Girls Just Want to Have Fun."

"Our children have been dancing at Footnotes since 2012 and they love it more and more every season," said Alicia Ortiz. "Remembering where they were and seeing where they are now is just amazing."

The 24-member Teen Super team (ages 12-14) also qualified for the nationals, placing third.