

Keeps dance alive for county kids



Ann Carrington couldn't take her eyes off the ten girls going through their dance routine at the Blackstone Memorial Center Thursday. The dance recital was upon them, and this was their final rehearsal. Next year would be her 25th year teaching dance in Southside Virginia...but her eyes were saying this class was just as exciting and important as her first class in Crewe in 1968.

"I guess

that's one reason I've done this so long. I get such a high off of watching these children. It's a lot of hard work and it's frustrating at recital, but when you see them come out on the stage and perform, it makes it all worthwhile." She laughed and her eyes began to dance.

Her daughter Suzanne was teaching the Blackstone class. Her other daughter, Angela, was teaching classes in her Farmville studio. But even with the help of two daughters, both dance majors, there was still all that driving—Victoria on Tuesday, Crewe on Wednesday. "I called myself the traveling dance teacher," she said, looking back on her career.

No, it was more like a mission, you think after listening to her talk. Keeping dance alive in Southside Virginia and bringing the opportunity to county kids was more important to her than making her life easier. She readily admits that if it wasn't for her driving out to the towns, "there would be a lot of children who would not be able to take dance."

Especially now, she added, because all the mothers are working and don't have the time to take their kids to dance class. By having her classes at places like the Memorial Center the school bus brings the kids right to the door.

Traveling and teaching dance have always been a way of life for her. Married to a Navy man, she was always traveling. “Everywhere we lived I would open up the door and roll the carpet, and all the neighborhood kids would come over for dance lessons.” Taking dance to the people has always been natural to her.

But what was even more natural was her love for children and watching them develop through dance. “You are converting this raw energy into something constructive, into a form that turns out to be a dancer.” Starting with the basics of ballet and tap, she is able to take her students into any type of dance. “Anybody that saw our last recital saw just about every kind of dance you can do,” she said proudly.

Teaching dance to each new generation requires that you adapt to the changing music, she says. “Kids are more aware of dance now. I think television is the cause of that. They see more dance...so you can’t just sit back and keep doing the same old toe-point, you’ve got to make it interesting.”

But while the music may change, the marriage of discipline to energy stays the same. And that’s what children really hunger for, she says. They spend the whole year looking forward to the dance recital “and the pretty costumes and the audience...it’s really exciting and exhilarating for the students.” When the students start young, they learn to listen and take directions—“This is the foundation I build on,” she said.

And being a dancer is also being able to overcome fear. “Some of the young students are afraid and cry before the recital, but they go through with it, and the parents will say they are ready to come back again” And this is how Mrs. Carrington knows she is doing something right. Her students stay with her, some for 14 years.

Now, after 24 years, she is meeting her old students on the street with their children and she’s getting second generation students in her classes. Each year she gets more and more graduation and wedding invitations, but what she is always looking for is that special student who will want to carry on her work and keep dance alive.

“I’m so glad my mother made me take dance lessons,” she said suddenly, and her eyes started dancing again.



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BLACKSTONE DANCE CLASS: (Front, left) Allison Yancey, Allison Gunn, Mandy Beaver, Ginny Cobbs, Jacqueline Collins; (2nd row) Bonnie Perkinson, Chasity Halt, Lisa Dalton; (rear) Erin Jones, Coley Jones. (Photos by Ed Conley)