

# Schools brings magic of dance to the Springs

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THE GAZETTE

The hallways connecting the three studios - aligned in a row on the west side of Sunrise Methodist Church - are filled with aspiring dancers. The summer intensive program has begun at The Ballet Society of Colorado Springs.

"They're here from 9 a.m. until 8 p.m.," said **Patricia Hoffman**, who founded the school in 1997 and runs it today with **Holly Marble**, who joined in 2003 as the company's co-director.

The Ballet Society is the region's largest dance studio, with about 10 faculty members and nearly 400 students - including about 50 in Colorado's Classical Youth Ballet, the studio's advanced program.

**VENUE:** Rehearsals are in the studio, where one of the spaces is large enough to stand in for the Pikes Peak Center stage. The company prepares 10 to 13 performances a year, in venues ranging from the Pikes Peak Center - the Ballet Society supplies the kids for the Colorado Springs Philharmonic's "Nutcracker" - to cozy Packard Hall, where they recently collaborated with student composers from the Colorado Springs Conservatory.

**BACKGROUND:** Hoffman danced and directed for numerous companies, including Ballet International and San Diego Ballet, and ran a dance studio in San Diego before moving to Colorado Springs in the 1990s. She intended to leave the ballet business.

"Having four youngsters was competing with having a studio of 400," she said. "But I had daughters who wanted to dance, so I didn't stay on the sidelines very long."

A class became a studio, and a studio became a school.

Marble was born and raised here, left to pursue a dance career that included a decade with Nevada Ballet Theatre, and returned.

"I came back because my husband and I wanted to find a place near one set of parents," she said.

**TAKE ON THE SCENE:** Although one of the region's major dance studios closed its doors earlier this year, the Ballet Society is thriving.

"We're not arrogant," Hoffman said. "We don't assume that we can announce a performance and just have people show up. We work at building audiences. Promotion and marketing are part of everything we do."

But she said dance isn't that hard a sell - if it's good.

"People want quality dance," Hoffman said.

**CHALLENGES:** "There isn't a local professional ballet company," Hoffman said. "The closest is in Denver - and they have dancers from all over the world competing for 20 positions."

**REWARDS:** It's a pleasure to work with these kinds of kids," Hoffman said. "It feels good whether a student goes on to a professional career, or decides to try something else with the foundation we gave them."

For Marble, the magic occurs during performances: "When the audience feels that passion and energy from the kids, it's amazing."

**DEFINE SUCCESS:** Achieving annual goals, she said. "It's easy to say, 'we'll do this and this,' but hard to make it happen."

There are less-tangible signs of success. Last year, a woman brought her daughter to study at the school because the woman's cousin had enjoyed Hoffman's teaching - in San Diego, more than two decades earlier.