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ANNIVERSARY ISSUE!

GULF COAST DANCE AFTER KATRINA

# DANCE

# Spirit

September 2006

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# A Region Rebuilds

By Joshua Kinser



*Stay with Me, choreographed by Tom Ralabate for the New Orleans Youth Ballet's April concert, A Time to Dance.*

ONE YEAR AFTER HURRICANES  
KATRINA AND RITA, THE  
DANCE COMMUNITY IN THE  
GULF IS STILL STRUGGLING  
TO GET BACK ON ITS FEET.



GK PHOTOGRAPHY

Janette Orlando was 2 when she started dancing at the Hopkins School of Dance in Kenner, LA. In July 2005, she and her sister Julianne decided to buy the studio. But just as registration was coming to an end, Hurricane Katrina struck the city.

Two months later, the sisters returned to find the studio doors blockaded by debris. They fought their way in and looked up, only to stare into the open sky. "The barres that I had for 22 years [were] on the ground; pictures that [have been on] the same walls for years were in a puddle of muck," Janette says. "Priceless records were destroyed, the mirrors were gone and glass was everywhere." Most of the students were homeless.

Meanwhile, Edie Ollwerther, director of Edie's Dance Factory in NJ, watched reports of Katrina on the news and felt compelled to help. She went online to dance-teacher.com, found a posting from Masquerade Dance offering to pair studios in need with studios offering help, and was connected with Hopkins. Ollwerther's packages of music, dancewear and accessories were the first of many to reach the sisters. The generosity of Ollwerther and others enabled the sisters to hold classes at a temporary location while their studio was repaired. At presstime, they were scheduled to return in August.

Hopkins is among the few studios able to reopen so soon. Dancers are still rehearsing in borrowed shoes and driving miles from their hometowns to get to the nearest class. Below are the states of affairs of a handful of affected studios and schools and what these businesses still need, along with organizations that have provided aid and, in some cases, are still collecting donations. **To share your story, fill out our online form at [dancespirit.com](http://dancespirit.com). Contact [editor@dancespirit.com](mailto:editor@dancespirit.com) if you'd like to offer assistance.**

#### A TIME TO DANCE STUDIOS, New Orleans

**Story:** A Time to Dance has two studios on the west bank of New Orleans. One in Marrero, Jefferson Parish, was unscathed, while the other studio in Algiers, Orleans Parish, was torn apart. It took nearly five months to get it cleaned up and reopened, at which point enrollment was down from 160 students to fewer than 100. The studio held its first dance recital since Katrina in June 2006. "We tried to make it as lighthearted and fun as possible, [because] some of these kids lost their homes and their schools," says teacher Laura Bloom Martin. **Help:** Capezio sponsored six students with \$500 total. Dancers Inc. and New York City Dance Alliance both held free conventions for area dancers. Dancers Inc. also donated dance shoes, dancewear and scholarships toward tuition. Wolff Fording sent shoes. **Needed:** Tuition assistance

#### DANCE MAGIC, Gautier, MS

**Story:** After Katrina ripped a hole in the roof of Karen Taylor Frosch's studio, Dance Magic, it looked as if there had been a fire. Dust and debris covered everything. Then she lost her lease, because her landlord decided to rent the space

My students were dancing barefoot  
and in pajamas. They were so  
happy to have leotards,  
it made me cry.

—Jaune Buisson, director of Metropolitan Dance Theater

# Gulf Coast Dance Scene

Javier's Dance Studio after receiving more than three feet of water and mud from Lake Pontchartrain

This kind of need  
doesn't stop in a year.  
People are still  
struggling.

—Joyce Pennington, director of  
American Dance/Drill Team



to a company helping with the recovery. When she reopened, only half her students returned. "One class went from 12 to two. My competition team went from 20 to eight," Frosch says. **Help:** Capezio sponsored the tuition of three students with a total of \$400. Bakersfield Regional Ballet in Bakersfield, CA, donated pointe shoes, leotards and tights. A cash donation from Capital Fitness Spa Health Club in Asheville, NC, enabled the purchase of a ballet barre. **Needed:** Ballet and tap shoes, leotards, costumes, toys

## DELTA FESTIVAL BALLET AND GIACOBBE ACADEMY OF DANCE Metairie, LA

**Story:** Of the school's three locations, one studio received minor water damage, a back wall was blown out and the A/C unit was ripped from the roof. A more devastating loss, however, occurred in the warehouse, where two feet of water destroyed an expensive, award-winning Robert O'Hearn *Nutcracker* set. All three sites were only closed for a month and reopened on October 3, 2005. DFB has held three recitals since; this summer, it held a workshop. **Help:** Former Giacobbe students rallied together with members of DFB and dancers from Giacobbe's nonprofessional company, New

Orleans Youth Ballet, for a fundraising performance titled *A Time to Dance*, held in. "It was a homecoming and comeback performance," Director Joseph Giacobbe says. Alums returned to participate, and NYC choreographer Tom Ralabate created a piece for DFB and NOYB. Helene Belden, of Simply Dance in CA, held benefit performances. DFB received inventory from a Boston dance storeowner. **Needed:** Dance gear for a fundraiser sale, with proceeds going toward rebuilding efforts and providing affordable dancewear to the community

## JAVIER'S DANCE STUDIO Slidell, LA

**Story:** This arts center's two classrooms, storage shed and lobby received more than three feet of water and mud from Lake Pontchartrain. Five trees fell on the main ballet studio, caving in the roof and splitting the room in two. Oddly, no mirrors were broken. "We had to get rid of everything—the floor, stage props, curtains, costumes. When we woke up after the storm we were both unemployed and homeless," says Melissa Juarez, who directs the school with husband Javier Juarez.

The couple immediately started clean up and repairs, working every day to scrub,

paint and rebuild, and even taught their 4-year-old, Arian, to hammer and pull nails. The Juarezes reopened in January; enrollment is still down 50 percent. **Help:** Javier received a \$6,000 rebuilding grant from the state. T-shirts, tights, shoes and dancewear were donated from Encore Productions, O'Malley's School of Dance in Medway, MA, and Music General in Brainerd, MN. **Needed:** Students and dance instructors, jazz shoes and dance sneakers in larger sizes, tuition assistance. Most of all, Melissa says: "We need to perform."

## KELLY'S SCHOOL OF DANCE AND GYMNASTICS, New Orleans

**Story:** This studio was flooded with six feet of water. Everything inside was lost, including the floor, equipment, mirrors, mats, all business records and video recordings of every recital and competition in which the school had participated since opening 56 years ago. Immediately following the storm, Director Adrienne Mitchell relocated to Houston and taught displaced students out of the garage of the house she was renting. Starpower refunded fees so her students could participate in its annual competition. At presstime, Kelly's was aiming for an August reopening. **Help:** In addition to Starpower's aid, the students

# Gulf Coast Dance Scene

Sammantha Foster, Miss Dance of the United States, helping to distribute items at the West Bank Studio of Dance courtesy of the United States Tournament of Dance Kids Aid fundraiser



were offered free attendance to the NYLA dance convention held in New Orleans, but most were displaced and unable to attend. **Needed:** Everything. "We're starting from zero," Mitchell says.

## METROPOLITAN DANCE THEATER OF NEW ORLEANS, Metairie, LA

**Story:** Located about 10 minutes from where the levees breached, MDT was flooded by three feet of water that caused the dance floor to buckle. Parts of the ceiling were damaged and shoes and CDs were floating in the water. To get students dancing again, Director Jaune Buisson set up an impromptu studio in the back of a beauty parlor that had lost clients and was looking for ways to generate extra cash.

To announce the beauty parlor classes, Buisson painted her cell phone number and studio info on destroyed doors and used them as billboards, planting them at three strategic intersections. "Signs were the best way to communicate, because my studio number was disconnected and my clients' numbers and addresses had changed," she says. She started with 10 students and in three weeks had 100. Three weeks later, MDT moved to Country Day School in New Orleans. Buisson has since put on two recitals. **Help:** Indianapolis modern company Dance Kaleidoscope donated more than 300 leotards, dance shoes and other dance items. "Before this, my students were dancing barefoot and in pajamas," says Buisson. MDT students have also participated in a pen pal program started by United States Tournament of Dance. **Needed:** Portable barres

## SOFTLEY DANCE ACADEMY Metairie, LA

**Story:** "It looked like a bomb blew up," says

# A Snapshot of Relief Efforts

## AMERICAN DANCE/DRILL TEAM COMPETITION, Central Texas

Owner Joyce Pennington and her staff collected donations from Tote Unlimited, Champions Tours, ATS Tours and Travel and many other organizations for 1,500 backpacks filled with school supplies that were distributed to students displaced to Texas. The organization also waived \$25,000 in competition entry fees for affected teams, and spearheaded a pen pal program (to participate, e-mail [danceadts@aol.com](mailto:danceadts@aol.com)).

## AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND

Beginning on September 20, 2005, Americans for the Arts distributed more than \$110,000 in funds to over 30 arts organizations that were conducting community-wide recovery efforts. Since mid-December, the Emergency Relief Fund has been deactivated due to insufficient funds; should more money become available, the application process will reopen. Check [artsusa.org](http://artsusa.org) for updates.

## DANCE MASTERS OF AMERICA

Dance Masters' efforts were so successful that they still have people calling with costumes, dancewear and music recordings, and many of its members are still collecting donations. The organization raised a total of \$25,000 through DMA donations and its Friendship Fund. For more: [dmanann@aol.com](mailto:dmanann@aol.com)

## JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE Becket, MA

Through December 31, the Pillow will offer creative residencies that provide housing, unlimited studio time and access to Pillow archives to choreographers affected by the Gulf hurricanes. Louisiana's Maritza Mercado-Narcisse participated from March 28 to April 9, creating a solo piece titled *Melpomene's Sense of Humor* that was performed at the State of the Nation festival in New Orleans in June.

## KIDS ARTISTIC REVUE

KAR sent studios dancewear, money, costumes and music. It also set up a sponsor-a-studio program that connected studios that wanted to help with affected studios. Spirit and Truth Dance Company, for instance, was paired with the Colorado-based Star Struck Academy of Dance, which held a fundraiser production and sent support through cards and letters.

## LOIS COWLES HARRISON CENTER FOR THE VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS Lakeland, FL

This arts school for grades 9-12 took in one dance and five musical theater students from New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. The school also held a fundraiser that made \$1,600 for NOCCA and provided students with "everything from ballet shoes to lunch every day at school," says principal Craig S. Collins.

## NEW YORK LOS ANGELES DANCE CONVENTIONS & COMPETITIONS

Through its I'm Still Dancing-Katrina Dancer Relief Fund, NYLA has collected and distributed more than \$50,000 worth of new costumes (\$40,000 from DesignWorks, a national costume and recital company in Ludlow, MA), more than \$10,000 worth of new and used dance shoes and over \$5,000 worth of new and used clothing, stuffed animals, suitcases, backpacks and portable CD players. "I've gone down to Louisiana and Mississippi to distribute items personally," says director and New Orleans native Skip Costa. NYLA has also given scholarships to regional conventions, helped students get classes at studios where they relocated, established a rebuilding fund for affected studios and paired those in need with those offering help. Some adult and children's costumes along with new and used dance shoes are still available in the NYLA storage office in Louisiana. Currently, NYLA is seeking sponsors to help volunteer dance teachers get to affected areas. Anyone affected can send a letter detailing needs to: NYLA DANCE, PO Box 818, Times Square Station, New York, NY 10108; or e-mail [info@nyladance.com](mailto:info@nyladance.com).

## RED LODGE SCHOOL OF DANCE Red Lodge, MT

Red Lodge contacted *Dance Teacher* magazine in search of a small hard-hit dance school. After being directed to a billboard where dancers and schools were reaching out for help, Red Lodge, under the direction of Pat Luptak and Elizabeth Prather, chose Jessica Natal of Full Force Dance Co. in Metairie, LA. Red Lodge started fundraising in February with a bake sale and then sold Little Caesars' Pizza Kits. Combined with donations from its community, Red Lodge raised \$2,500. The money was split between

[continued on p.98]

# Gulf Coast Dance Scene



**Michelle Jacobs with the 200 pounds of dance goods that she shipped to Spirit And Truth Dance Company in Ocean Springs, MS. She has since started Dance Costumes for Dancing Kids to collect costumes for distribution to underprivileged dancers around the world.**

owner Debbie Softley of her studio. Mold was growing on the walls, the carpet and floors were ruined, wires were hanging exposed, and insulation and debris were everywhere. Softley shared a rented space with the Cherri Desporte Dance Academy, a studio located beneath hers that sustained even worse mold damage. At presstime, both businesses were returning in August. **Help:** According to Softley, no assistance has been received. **Needed:** New floor, tumbling mat, stereo system, tights, tap shoes and leotards

## **SPIRIT AND TRUTH DANCE COMPANY, Ocean Springs, MS**

**Story:** Director Cindy Cheek's home and the facility she was renting for dance lessons were destroyed. She and her family lost 90 percent of their possessions, but they put rebuilding their home on hold to purchase dance equipment and rent studio space from Dream Weaver Gymnastics. Spirit and Truth reopened in January and held its first recital in June. **Help:** Dance Distributors sent dancewear and shoes. Kids Artistic Revue donated dancewear and T-shirts. Spirit and Truth dancers attended and competed in the NYLA dance conventions in New Orleans for free. NYLA also sent dancewear and costumes. Star Struck Academy of Dance in Colorado sent money raised through a benefit performance. Michelle Jacobs, a 17-year-old student at Dance Dimensions in Fort Lauderdale, sent 200 pounds of costumes collected from dancers in her community. **Needed:** Grants and donations to open a new dance and community center. **DS**

*Joshua Kinser is a freelance journalist in Gulf Breeze, FL.*

## **[A Snapshot of Relief Efforts continued from p.96]**

Full Force and the family of Red Lodge's new jazz instructor, who moved from St. Bernard Parish in New Orleans after losing her home.

## **ROBIN DAWN ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS Cape Coral, FL**

Robin Dawn Ryan and Kim Barber of Robin Dawn Academy of Performing Arts in Cape Coral, FL, raised more than \$20,000 through their Katrina Dance Aid Fund and dance benefit performance The Show Must Go On, held in Fort Myers, FL.

## **ROBINSON'S SCHOOL OF DANCE Mobile, AL**

Robinson's, under the direction of Ashley Fuqua, provided free instruction to five displaced dancers from New Orleans and Ocean Springs, MS, and supported them with dancewear and an air-conditioned rehearsal room. Some students are still driving from their FEMA trailers in Ocean Springs to Robinson's to take classes. Mia Roth was working as an instructor in southern Mississippi before the storm and is now on staff there. "Robinson's has taken these dancers under its wing and helped everyone here get back to some kind of normal," Roth says.

## **SILVER SHELLS BEACH RESORT & SPA, Destin, FL**

Sisters Lori Deslonde and Heather Wells were students at Javier's Dance Studio in Slidell, LA, when Katrina hit. After a week shoveling mud out of their house, which didn't have electricity or water, they went to Destin, FL, for a respite. While waiting in a FEMA housing line, Carla Becnel of Silver Shells Resort offered free rent in one of her five waterfront

Destin condos that she had decided to loan out to hurricane victims. The sisters fell in love with Destin and, upon discovering a demand for dance training there, have opted to stay and open their own studio. They are ineligible for FEMA and SBA grants because they are starting somewhere new.

## **STAGESTEP**

This Philadelphia-based dance and theater flooring company completely restored the dance floor at devastated Sabine Pass School in Sabine Pass, TX. The company also offered thousands of dollars in flooring discounts to devastated studios, schools and theaters. Discounts toward replacement studio flooring will be available through the end of the year. For more: [randy@stagestep.com](mailto:randy@stagestep.com)

## **UNITED DANCE MERCHANTS OF AMERICA**

UDMA collaborated with Dance Masters of America to bring relief to dance teachers and studio owners, raising \$1,598 with a raffle at the NY/NJ Costume Preview Show Fashion Dinner and "loose change" drop boxes at National Dance Week booths. UDMA members alone made donations totaling \$5,000. "We felt it was UDMA's responsibility to help business owners who may have lost everything, [including] their livelihood and ability to provide for their families, and the families of their employees," says Executive Director Gina Costello.

## **UNITED STATES TOURNAMENT OF DANCE**

President and CEO Sean Flanagan joined relief efforts in NYC this past October at Kids Aid, a benefit performance held at Brooklyn's Xavier High School that was developed by NYC Councilman Domenic Recchia and three schools based in Brooklyn and Staten Island (Horizons Dance Center, Reflections in Dance and Dance Works Dance Center) that raised more than \$15,000. Flanagan and the USTD used the benefit to also collect dance supplies for distribution to Gulf Coast dancers, through West Bank Dance Studios Relief Fund, started by Jamie Chiasson. Even the costumes the dancers wore were donated.

While distributing supplies in New Orleans, USTD began a pen pal program and gathered information to connect studios from around the country with studios in need. "There's only so far that federal dollars will go," says Flanagan. "Private industry has an ethical responsibility to provide aid to [its] own. If each industry would do just that, the problem would be much smaller."