



**VENTURE
NORTH**

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Tim Ervin
231-794-0089
timervinassoc@gmail.com

PANDEMIC RESILIENCE: BACK TO THE ROARING 20's?

MANISTEE, MICHIGAN – When co-owners of the Conservatory of Dance Shelli Golembiewski and Tarah Fancher talk about the COVID pandemic, their business, their clientele and certainly their families, one word sums it up best: apprehension.

But they are quick to see the glass half-full.

“The end is in sight and we will get through this,” says Golembiewski. “I feel that God has a plan and the vaccine is going to be huge in helping us turn the corner. In the meantime, the recent grant from the Regional Resiliency Program and the support of the Industrial Development Corporation gives us assurance about covering our rent, paying teachers when we can reopen and helps to calm the underlying apprehension.”

The Regional Resiliency Program, operated by Venture North Funding & Development which was formed beginning with a \$200,000 grant from the Consumers Energy Foundation, provides grants to businesses with nine or fewer employees. About \$600,000 has been raised through philanthropy so far, enabling grants of up to \$5,000 to 200 businesses affected by the COVID pandemic.

Golembiewski and Fancher, both veteran dancers, acquired the dance studio in 2014. Both say they are honored to own and run the business where they grew up taking dance classes and making life-changing memories. Their business, located at 321 Oak Grove Street in Manistee, is now closed by Executive Order but would normally have approximately 180 dance students learning ballet, tap, contemporary, hip hop, acro-dance and more. Though the studio is proud of the number of boys that take dance, about 95% of the students are girls that may be enrolled from the time they are out of diapers to graduating high school and beyond.

Fancher was one such girl who started dance classes at the Conservatory in 1990, the business's very first year, at the age of four and continued throughout her senior year of high school. Right after graduation she was offered a teaching position at the studio where she continued to dance and teach for the next two years. She then auditioned and took an entertainment position at Walt Disney World located in Orlando, FL for a year before returning home to teach dance once again in 2007. She remained a seasonal employee of Walt Disney World until 2013.

“We're memory-makers for the next generation,” said Fancher. “That includes the adrenaline, exhilaration and pride that comes with performing on stage before a live audience in a recital or competition. But it's also about life lessons: team work, time management, building confidence and self-determination. For the community, we offer a safe place for kids to spend their time and we take pride in helping raise and support the young people who are our future.”

One such memory is sure to be created when approximately 20 Conservatory of Dance students will perform for the assisted living facility Green Acres in Manistee on December 22, 2020. This performance will take place in the parking lot while the residents of the facility enjoy the performance from their windows. “It's a chance for our students to safely spread holiday cheer, give back to the community and learn about the importance of caring for the elderly,” says Golembiewski.

Shelli Golembiewski started at the Conservatory of Dance at age three, danced for 15 years, taught at the Conservatory between 2009 and 2014 and joined Fancher in buying the business at the end of 2014. She was competitively selected during her junior year of high school to be part of the Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp Ballet Ensemble that toured France, Germany and Switzerland. Manistee is her home and where her family lives and while she's toured the U.S. and Europe, she values the tradition and memories of her coastline community above all other places.

“In addition to the Resiliency Grant, a lot of Manistee people have had our backs during the pandemic,” she says. “People like Jeff Seng who allowed us to do an outdoor summer recital at his marina at no cost, to the dance parents who continued to support us when we were shut down just as though we were open. The compassion and support has meant more to us than they know.”

“The last time our country saw a pandemic of this magnitude was the Spanish Flu of 1918 and when it was over we entered into the time period of the famous roaring 20's. People are always saying history repeats itself so wouldn't it be great if we had a time of wonderful achievement, innovation and happiness a century later?

The end of this pandemic would be a fantastic reason for a celebration. I think everyone will want to get up and dance,” says Golembiewski.

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Those wishing to help ensure the success of the Conservatory of Dance may contribute by:

- Going online to www.theconservatoryofdance.net
- Or mailing checks to Conservatory of Dance, 321 Oak Grove St., Manistee, MI 49660 or call Shelli Golembiewski at 231-690-2185