

# PREMIERE OC

Your guide to the performing and visual arts in Orange County

Spring/Summer 2014

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A scene from one of The Wooden Floor's annual shows

## Dance to Success

The payoff for students in The Wooden Floor's programs can continue for years

by Rose Flores Medlock

Perhaps the most poignant effect The Wooden Floor has had on the community is evident through its success stories.

A student who began dancing with the Santa Ana-based organization when she was in fourth grade today is a pre-med student—the first in her family to attend college. “Her father raised her and her brother as a single parent,” says Executive Director Dawn S. Reese. “Because [of her] father’s support and The Wooden Floor’s support, she’s double majoring in math and biology. We call this the ripple effect, because her success is galvanizing her family. Her mother went on to get her GED, her brother is in college studying engineering, and her father is still an active volunteer here.”

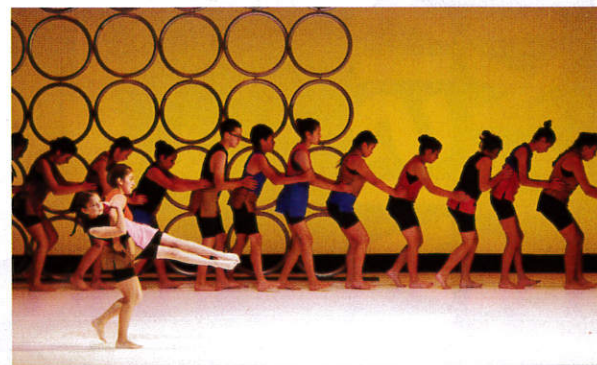
“One young man was able to rise above his circumstances and earned a scholarship to UCLA’s dance program,” adds Artistic Director Melanie Rios Glaser.

Reese and Glaser agree that cultivating an environment in which students become successful in life and school changes the child, his or her family, and the larger community of Orange County. The Wooden Floor was founded in 1983 by Beth Burns, who wanted to give low-income children a way to build confidence and develop a sense of discipline and success. “It’s also about having students problem-solve and be co-creators, making sure what they have to say and who they are really matters,” says Glaser.

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Among the programs The Wooden Floor offers are Dance Free Weeks and an annual concert.

Dance Free Weeks are on-site programs at area schools where students participate in dance classes one hour each day for five days. “We’ve served over 75,000 students through Dance Free Weeks and our year-round program at our Santa Ana campus,” Reese says. For the annual concert—which takes place May 29 through 31 at the Irvine Barclay Theatre this year—students work with professional choreographers from across the country.



“The process is fantastic for the students as they experience the full journey of the creative process,” Glaser says. “It builds community, a sense of self, and being witness to who they are and what they can accomplish.”