The Wooden Floor Helps Put Their Best Foot Forward

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By Jackie Moe

The Wooden Floor isn't just a dance company. It combines dance, academics and college preparation under one roof for low-income families. Founded in 1983, the Santa Ana group serves 375 students every year.

For the tenth consecutive year, 100 percent of The Wooden Floor's senior class will graduate on time and immediately enroll in higher education.

Wendolyne Rincon was 10 when her mother took her to The Wooden Floor's 6 a.m. auditions in Santa Ana.

"I was furious for having to wake up early on a Saturday, but as soon as I stepped into the studio, I knew I was right where I needed to be," said Rincon, a senior at Godinez High School in Santa Ana.

"Dance didn't change my life, it became my life. Whenever I was stressing over school, work, boyfriends or family issues, it was dance I turned to as an escape," Rincon said. She plans to attend California State University Channel Islands in the fall.

Rincon and other graduating seniors from the program were honored Thursday at the organization's second annual Step Beyond breakfast.

"To have members of the community sharing in their excitement and joy shows our students that they have made the right choice," said executive director Dawn Reese. "Their community is behind them. Their community believes in them. They are worthy of their success. And their future accomplishments will not be bound by their current socioeconomic status."

When asked about her time with The Wooden Floor, graduating senior **Sophia Saenz** said, "After spending eight years at The Wooden Floor with invaluable staff and friends, I feel prepared to move forward in my career in order to achieve my goals. I have developed so much dedication to dance and my education. I have attended rehearsals and managed a hectic schedule in order to be a part of this extended family."

Saenz will attend DePaul University in Chicago in the fall. She plans to major in business with a minor in Spanish.