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Dance Has Changed Lives for 30 Years at Southern California Nonprofit

SANTA ANA, California (January 21, 2013) – **The Wooden Floor**, previously known as Saint Joseph Ballet, an arts-based youth development nonprofit, is celebrating 30 years of breaking the cycle of poverty in Orange County, California through long-term dance immersion. The results are astounding—**since 2005, 100% of graduates from The Wooden Floor have finished high school on time and enrolled in college**, outperforming their socioeconomic peers threefold.

“Through dance at The Wooden Floor, I found a path that hurled me past the adversity I faced. It has played such a vital role in the confident individual that I have become,” remembers graduate of The Wooden Floor, **Robert Valdovinos** (Class of 2008). Robert graduated from the University of Rochester in 2012, with a degree in Environmental Science, and is now a graduate student at the University of Rochester’s Warner School of Education. He was the second person in his family to get a college degree. The first was his older sister **Blanca**, also a graduate of The Wooden Floor (Class of 2007), who graduated from Cornell University with a major in Biology in 2011, and now is in her second year of medical school at University of Rochester. Their youngest brother, **Bryan** will graduate from The Wooden Floor in 2013, and plans to pursue higher education as well. The Valdovinos family, like many at The Wooden Floor, comes from a background where resources are extremely limited and the quest to break the cycle of poverty has many obstacles.

The Wooden Floor’s commitment to promoting a dance aesthetic that values exploration, discovery, and innovation is the reason why Bryan, Blanca, Robert and many others like them have seen such success. “Contemporary dance is our real differentiator,” states **Artistic Director & Co-CEO Melanie Ríos Glaser**, “It has the ability to encourage greater curiosity and attentiveness, develops creative problem solving, and promotes discipline and motivation.”

History of The Wooden Floor:

- The Wooden Floor was founded in 1983 as a summer pilot dance program by Beth Burns, who at the time was in the order of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange. 300 youth were exposed to dance in the first three years.
- The organization’s goal was to provide a safe haven for youth afterschool so they would not fall prey to the destructive behaviors that plague low-income communities.
- Today the organization serves 375 students annually year-round, with a total of over 75,000 youth served in its 30-year history. It has set itself apart amongst other arts-for-youth organizations in the nation by uniquely intertwining its long-term intensive dance education with focused academic programs, pre-collegiate mentoring, and family support services.
- 132 alumni of The Wooden Floor are currently enrolled in colleges and universities in California and across the nation including Wellesley, NYU, Boston College, Cornell, UCLA, and Southern Methodist. 80 of these alumni are currently receiving college scholarships from The Wooden Floor.

“Over the past 30 years, The Wooden Floor has met the challenges in our community every step of the way, and in doing so our students have gained the tools and resources to be successful in school and life. In looking ahead, we are seeking ways to deepen our impact in the community and give more students access to brighter futures,” says Executive Director and Co-CEO Dawn S. Reese. “We want the next 30 years to be as important as the first.”

About The Wooden Floor: The Wooden Floor is an arts-based youth development nonprofit that annually provides 375 low-income children with free long-term dance, academic, and family support services. Since 2005, 100 percent of the students who graduate from

The Wooden Floor finish high school on time and go on to pursue higher education - a rate three times the average for their socioeconomic peers. Visit www.TheWoodenFloor.org to learn more.

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Photo: Bryan Valdovinos performing in 2007, ready to graduate high school and enroll in college this year.

