



Broadway bound – students at Frisco Dance Force

photo by Chris Fritchie

## Class Acts: Creative Outlets for All Ages

By Tamara Gurley

FINE ARTS, drama and dance, oh my! That is the tune Debra Swaim from Frisco Dance Force sang as she expanded her dance center to include a larger variety of disciplines. Ms. Swaim, with the help of Shannon Jamail, owner of KidsNArt, a fine arts program; Toni Roberts, owner of Drama Kids and Dallas Summer Musicals Academy of Performing Arts is turning the Frisco Dance Force facilities into a one-stop arts shop. Though Ms. Swaim was busy painting walls and installing new toilets in her newly remodeled center, she took a few moments to talk about how Frisco Dance Force came about and where it is headed.

Ms. Swaim is passionate about the arts; she began dancing as a child and has never stopped. After attending Lamar University in Beaumont where she received a degree in Dance, Ms. Swaim set her eyes on Frisco. In 1999, she completed her move to the growing city and opened Frisco Dance Force, which is now one of the leading dance companies in the city. In 2004, her sister, Elizabeth

Sanford, moved to Frisco to be a part of the venture. With many years of dance experience herself, Ms. Sanford joined the company as co-owner and has been there ever since.

“We have always held the philosophy that though we keep things professional, we want it to feel like a family environment,” said Ms. Swaim. “We are family and we treat all of our clients like they are a part of it.”

With approximately 400 clients coming in annually, Frisco Dance Force offers a wide-variety of dance training taught by prestigious instructors with extensive professional experience; they even have former Dallas Cowboy Cheerleader Tavia Chatham who has performed with A-list celebrities like Destiny’s Child, Big-N-Rich, Cheryl Crow and Journey. Many of the instructors have studied in New York or overseas at prestigious dance academies and conservatories. Among this impressive staff are several former Frisco Thunder Dance Team members who also train

under the Frisco Dance Force roof. The common bond among them is a desire to share their love for dance with the community.

“We currently offer dance classes to all levels and all ages,” said Ms. Swaim. “We even offer a senior tap class for those over 50. The group may begin performing around the community. They may not be professional, but they are very serious about their dancing.”

From drill team to lyrical dance to the many combination classes taught at the center, Frisco Dance Force will continue to provide dance instruction, while expanding into other areas. “Not everyone wants to do classical ballet,” said Ms. Swaim. “We want to offer more options so all children have something to enjoy.”

And that is just what they have done. Adding KidsNArt, Drama Kids and Dallas Summer Musicals will not only provide a wider range of programs, but it also will allow parents to have their children participate in different programs without driving all over town.



Frisco Area Children's Theater production  
of *The Little Mermaid*  
photo by John Brady

## Lights, Camera, Action

THERE ARE OTHER wonderful programs available for aspiring actors in Frisco. Check these out!

### FRISCO AREA CHILDREN'S THEATER

FACT's mission is to provide a safe and fun environment, for kids and adults alike, to learn and experience the fine art of theatrical production.

Frisco Area Children's Theater is offering two acting classes this spring for children age seven and up, taught by veteran actor and director Jesse Nichols.

#### "ACTING FROM A TO Z"

This class covers all aspects of acting for the theater. This is an excellent course for the beginner or, as a refresher for children with some acting experience.

Saturdays, March 28 to May 2, 12:30 p.m. to 1:45 p.m.

#### "ACTING FOR THE CAMERA"

Beyond what the title implies, this class also teaches students to plan, develop, cast, direct and star in a TV commercial.

Saturdays, March 28 to May 2, at 1:45 p.m. until 3 p.m.

### AUDITIONS

Audition for "The Wizard of Oz," directed by Jesse Nichols, Monday March 23 from 6:45 p.m. until 8 p.m. and Saturday, March 28 from 11 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. Actors of all ages are needed. Auditions will consist of cold readings from the script and some improvisation. Prior experience is not required. Cost is \$120 per student, per class.

All classes are held at Frisco Arts, 6827 Main Street. For more information contact Suzanne Keen, 972.770.8722 or [suzanne.keen@brinker.com](mailto:suzanne.keen@brinker.com)

### WORD OF MOUTH PRODUCTIONS

Theatre the entire family can enjoy! Musical Theatre for Ages 8 – 16

For more information contact Frisco Arts at 214.734.7326 Becky McCants, Managing Artistic Director or Box Office: 214.544.4630

"We love our location and when the studio next door to ours became available, we jumped on the opportunity to purchase it and fulfill our dream of expanding our programming," said Ms. Swaim.

KidsNArt will offer fine arts programming including drawing, painting, ceramics and sculpting for all ages, pre-kindergarten to adults. Creator and owner of KidsNArt, Shannon Jamail, has been a professional artist all her life and has taught art programs for more than ten years. She holds a degree in business management with extended studies in fine arts. She has done sales, marketing and training in the corporate world, but her true calling is with children and art. Her belief that she could give back to the community through her love for art was the driving force behind her creation of KidsNArt.

Ms. Swaim found in Ms. Jamail someone who could help complete her vision for the future. "I was looking to incorporate a fine arts program when I heard about Shannon, I contacted her to talk about how we could put our programs together."

Ms. Jamail, meanwhile, was operating out of a studio on Technology Drive in Frisco, but she was looking for a new location and wanted to merge with other arts programs. When Ms. Swaim called about joining the new arts center, Ms. Jamail was thrilled. "It was as if someone had read my mind," she said.

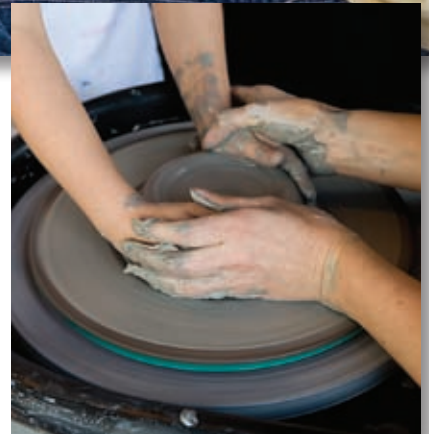
Ms. Jamail believes that the arts help children develop important life skills, such as self-confidence and self-esteem, that's one reason why she, along with Frisco Family Services, provides a scholarship program for kids who wouldn't be able to afford art classes otherwise. Each year KidsNArt gives a minimum of one child from Frisco Family Services an entire year of art classes free. It's a great way for children from all walks of life to be exposed to art and the benefits it provides.

According to Ms. Swaim, "You learn



Shannon Jamail teaches Laura Bar at the pottery wheel. (above);  
View of the pottery wheel from above (right)

photos by Chris Frütchie



pride through performance. We want to instill a positive self-image in our children. Through all of our programs kids will learn team work, responsibility and discipline.”

Another addition to the group, “Drama Kids International,” offers a unique, fun-filled children’s drama program that is used throughout the United States. Originally created by Helen O’ Grady, a popular TV actress in Australia, Drama Kids uses a series of fun, fast-paced activities to build speaking, acting and social skills in children.

When Ms. Swaim was looking for a drama program, she ran across Toni Roberts’ name and gave her a call. Ms. Roberts is the owner of the Collin County Drama Kids program. To Ms. Swaim’s surprise, Ms. Roberts was a dance mate from her college days. The reunion was a thrill for both women and a great fit for the arts center. Under the Frisco Dance Force roof, Drama Kids offers quality drama classes for the children of Frisco.

To top off this artistic synthesis, Dallas Summer Musicals (DSM), the orga-

nization in charge of bringing Broadway musicals to Dallas has teamed up with Frisco Dance Force to offer musical theater classes to Frisco residents. Students will learn the material for “School House Rock LIVE” and “Disney’s The Jungle Book KIDS” from an acting coach and choreographer from the DSM Academy of Performing Arts, and will perform the pieces in and around the community.

“I would like to think that we bring our community the best quality training we can,” said Ms. Swaim. “We try to set ourselves apart. We love what we do and we try to have a positive attitude. The students come to have fun, and they do, but they also receive good quality training.”

The new Frisco Dance Force facilities are open for business and parents can register their children for the program they want to join. Ms. Swaim is looking forward to offering combination classes, like the ballet-art class they are hosting this quarter. Any combination class can be scheduled through Frisco Dance

Force.

With all of new projects ahead of her, you would think Ms. Swaim would stop to take a breath, but if there’s one thing a dancer has a hard time doing, it’s keeping still. Ms. Swaim and Ms. Jamail are already planning to build a new facility in Prosper that will offer the same combination of art and dance classes currently found at the Frisco facility. And if that’s not enough, Ms. Swaim also has her sights set on the 2010 Winter Games where she hopes to initiate the competition’s first-ever dance competition. No doubt, she’ll do it.

*Tamara Gurley is a new contributor to Frisco STYLE. She and her family live in Frisco.*