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*Asian Bride, oil on canvas,
by Leah Beckham.*

The artist in everyone

By Dana Gavin Frank

ART IS HAPPENING EVERYWHERE, from music lessons in public schools to community theater rehearsals in the evenings. Visual art displays designed for mass consumption are being contemplated in board rooms, as a business executive is rushing to a dance class, and someone this evening might be picking up a musical instrument for the first time in years to join the Frisco Community Band.

People are finding new and exciting ways to express themselves all over Frisco and the surrounding areas, and many of them do not even consider themselves professional artists. They care, however, that art is a part of their lives, whether for personal achievement, new exploration or simple fun.

But who can manage to squeeze one more activity into already overloaded lives? How can anyone serve on another committee, or take an evening art class, or shuttle their child to and from more performances?

Many have decided that the payoff of a sense of accomplishment and a release from the stress of our daily lives, is worth it.

What appears universal among those involved in the arts, whether they are students, practitioners, supporters or vocal leaders, is a joyful energy for what they do and a desire to spread the word.

OPENING MINDS, EXPLORING TALENTS

Introducing arts education at the foundation level reasonably ensures that the next generation of Frisco citizens will have sensitivity to and an appreciation for the value of artistic expression.

“The arts are so important to a balanced community,” says Maher Maso, Mayer Pro Tem and a parent of three students in the Frisco Independent School District. “And they are important to the education of our children. The arts give the kids the balance of how to enjoy life and offer a way for them to grow.”

Arts programs across the state have been challenged by cuts to their state funding, but Mr. Maso lauds Frisco’s response.

“Frisco ISD has not reduced the funding and they are even expanding. As a parent I’m very comfortable with the direction it’s taking. Superintendent Dr. Rick Reedy has championed the arts,” raves Maso.

Debbie Jarzombek, director of elementary education for Frisco ISD, also feels strongly about the school district’s arts program.

“We are strong supporters in the arts because we believe the students should receive a well rounded education, not just with core classes but with the fine arts. Fine arts classes, such as music and visual art, support the students’ learning. Brain research in early childhood learning indicates that a fine arts education supports the development of the student, including reasoning skills, spatial thinking and mathematics,” explains Jarzombek.

And this approach to arts education is implemented immediately on the education ladder.

“We cultivate an appreciation of fine arts from kindergarten and up. In kindergarten, the children participate in weekly art and music classes. The physical education teachers collaborate with the fine arts teachers, who are full-time,” Jarzombek continues.

In middle school, the students get to choose between band, art and theater arts to fulfill their fine arts requirement. In high school, dance is added to the mix. Similar electives are offered at all of the Frisco campuses, because “we strive to offer equal education among all the elementary and middle schools,” says Ms. Jarzombek.

“The preface to the music curriculum emphasizes consistency,”

says Ida Lee Bright Elementary music specialist Terry Walsh. “All schools have music class, but how often the students attend each class is up to each school. It’s a site-based district, which helps us better meet the needs of each campus. Each campus has its own personality.”

What is consistent district-wide is an open admission elementary choir at each school. “Some campuses have choir during the school day and some have it after school,” says Ms. Walsh, “and each grade level puts on a program of some kind of music performance.”



Sunflowers, oil pastels on paper, by Kaitlyn York, 4th grade.

That each student is guaranteed a spot on stage is one of the program’s strengths. Ms. Walsh says, “Grade level performances give students who might not feel comfortable in front of an audience a chance to have the support of their peers. It’s an important concept, to become comfortable in front of a group (at an early age), so they don’t have to feel that discomfort in middle school and on.”

Frisco ISD also offers two district-wide arts events for students: Youth Art Month for K-12 and All-City Choir, an audition-based ensemble for 4th and 5th graders. “Every campus is represented at the Youth Art Month display, which was held last year at Centennial High School and featured selected art work on display,” said Jarzombek.

Now in its sixth year, the All-City Choir is the brainchild of Ms. Walsh, and fellow Frisco music teacher Kellie Rapp. At a Texas Music Educators Association convention, Ms. Walsh and Ms. Rapp were inspired by the Spring ISD Elementary Honor Choir performance, upon which they modeled the All-City Choir.

“At the time, I thought it would be a great way to unite the city,” says Ms. Walsh.

The choir is made up of 100 students from across the district, each of who audition for their place. Weekly practices are held outside of the school day and the choir is comprised of 4th and 5th graders from every campus.

The sense of camaraderie and accord fostered in the program is just one of the benefits, according to both Ms. Walsh and Ms. Jarzombek, whose daughter Kelsey was a choir member.



Laura Kenyon on violin; Lynsey Kenyon's pointe shoes.
photos by Garry Rascoe



Artistically, the choir is constantly challenged with difficult music, from songs in Latin and Spanish, to African folk songs and classical music. The hard work paid off last year at the DC Festival, held at Six Flags of Texas in Arlington.

"The choir won their division in the middle school and junior high division," says Ms. Walsh, and she highlights one other benefit: the networking of the school district's music educators.

"Frisco continues to attract great teachers, and the teamwork involved in running the choir is amazing," boasts Walsh.

AN EDUCATION FROM COMMITMENT

The time and energy required for participation with Collin County's performing groups is substantial, but according to parents like Bob Kenyon, it is of great value to the children.

His two daughters, thirteen-year-old Lynsey and eight-year-old Laura have performed in Collin County Ballet Theatre's *The Nutcracker* for two years. "Lynsey is a straight A honor roll student at Rice Middle School in Plano," says Mr. Kenyon, and he sees a direct correlation between Lynsey's success in school and her participation in full-length ballet productions. "Often you hear the expression 'if you want to get something done, find a busy person.' She learns to focus in the dance studio, and she learns to set goals. The determination necessary to learn a certain dance move is akin to the way you plan to complete a project."

The theme of self-confidence is often repeated when analyzing the benefits of arts education.

"They learn composure and confidence," says Mr. Kenyon, "because they've spent months perfecting their part and they

stand on stage in front of an audience and hit it, and they realize the significance. When you have a thousand people and a live orchestra, they realize they've done something of value."

Jane Weinman, whose daughter MaKenzie danced the role of "Clara" in the company's production last year, speaks of the toll such a calling takes.

"The family has to be willing to understand the commitment. When the child is so committed and dedicated, it becomes part of the family." For MaKenzie, and the many dance students in Collin County who share her dream of a professional career, a personal life becomes almost non-existent.

"She gives up everything else for dance because that is what is important to her," says Weinman. "That means missing movies and going out with friends."

Having to manage rehearsal, regular technique class and school all at once has proven valuable though. "She's learned how to manage her time very well because of rehearsal commitments," states Weiman.

HIGHER ARTS EDUCATION

Students dedicated to their artistic pursuits have the option to continue their study at Collin County Community College, where the fine arts department reflects the growth and energy the city of Frisco enjoys.

Kathryn Vermillion, member of the Frisco Association for the Arts and owner of Vermillion Galleries, will be an adjunct professor starting this fall, teaching Drawing and Art Appreciation. "I've been teaching art for seven years in lower education," says Ms. Vermillion, "I was attracted to higher education for the collaboration that goes on between the artists."

"Frisco continues to attract great arts teachers."



Untitled, oil pastels on paper, by Nelson Ward, 8th grade.

“It’s an exciting time to be a part of it all,” she adds on the prospect of joining the visual art faculty. “They offer all aspects of the arts and are in tune with contemporary trends of interdisciplinary visual study.”

Dance department chair Tiffanee Arnold has experienced steady growth in her area, and this fall will bring exciting new developments.

A studio on the Spring Creek Campus devoted just to dance is top on her list. “The 3,100 square-foot space opens at the end of month,” she says, “and it has state-of-the art lighting, mirrors and ballet barres.”

The program at the Preston Ridge Campus in Frisco has expanded from one dance class to offer six dance classes including tap, jazz and ballet.

And there’s a new dean. “Jeff Walter is the new dean of fine arts,” says Ms. Arnold, “He wants to know more about the dance program. He’s impressed with the fine arts department overall.”

Over the course of Ms. Arnold’s ten years as head of the dance department, she’s been responsible for furthering the program’s dedication to solid training.

“When I started at the program (in 1997), the classes were just beginning and intermediate level,” says Ms. Arnold, who assumed her current position in 1998. “I took the program and said, ‘Let’s make this something.’ The person in the position before me has a jazz company to dance at basketball games and a separate repertory company. I made it one, since all the students wanted an opportunity to perform.”

Every year since Ms. Arnold’s arrival, the Collin County Dance Repertory travels to the American College Dance Festival. “With the exception of one year,” she admits, when her daughter, Rylee, was born in the same month as the festival.

Workshops and choreography projects by the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble and Taylor 2 speak to Ms. Arnold’s vested interest in exposing the dancers to the professional sector. When Taylor 2 arrived in North Texas for their performance at the Charles W. Eisemann Center for Performing Arts and Corporate Presentation in Richardson, the company used the college’s studio facilities to rehearse. While in town, they taught master classes for the dance students and invited them to watch a professional rehearsal.

Finding the department’s mission included defining its approach to dance education.

Ms. Arnold re-imagined the curriculum “as a stepping stone to dance in higher education and a positive experience, whether making a career or doing it for other reasons.”

And she’s had success stories emerge from the program, sending students on to dance departments at Ohio State University, Texas Women’s University and Texas Christian University.

She has also had more subtle triumphs. “The mother of an eight-year-old ballet student was looking for an adult class. ‘I just want to have something in common with my daughter,’ she said. She enrolled and found a true interest. Her daughter came to the end-of-the-semester performance to see her mom dance,” says Arnold.

Plans are in place to expand the programs at the Preston

Ridge Campus. “Dance already had a space (on the campus), but because of the growth of city population and the demand from students, the college is hearing the need from the community to offer more classes and more diverse classes.”

Unfortunately, space issues still hinder Ms. Arnold from being able to offer all the same classes at Preston Ridge as are housed at the Spring Creek Campus. The City of Frisco and the Physical Education Department must share the dance studio.

For now, the new studio at Spring Creek is satisfying. “We have enough growth to support the new space and I’m able to have a more diverse curriculum. Adding 9:00 am Monday morning dance classes are an option. I can target even more students.”

SHARING THE WEALTH

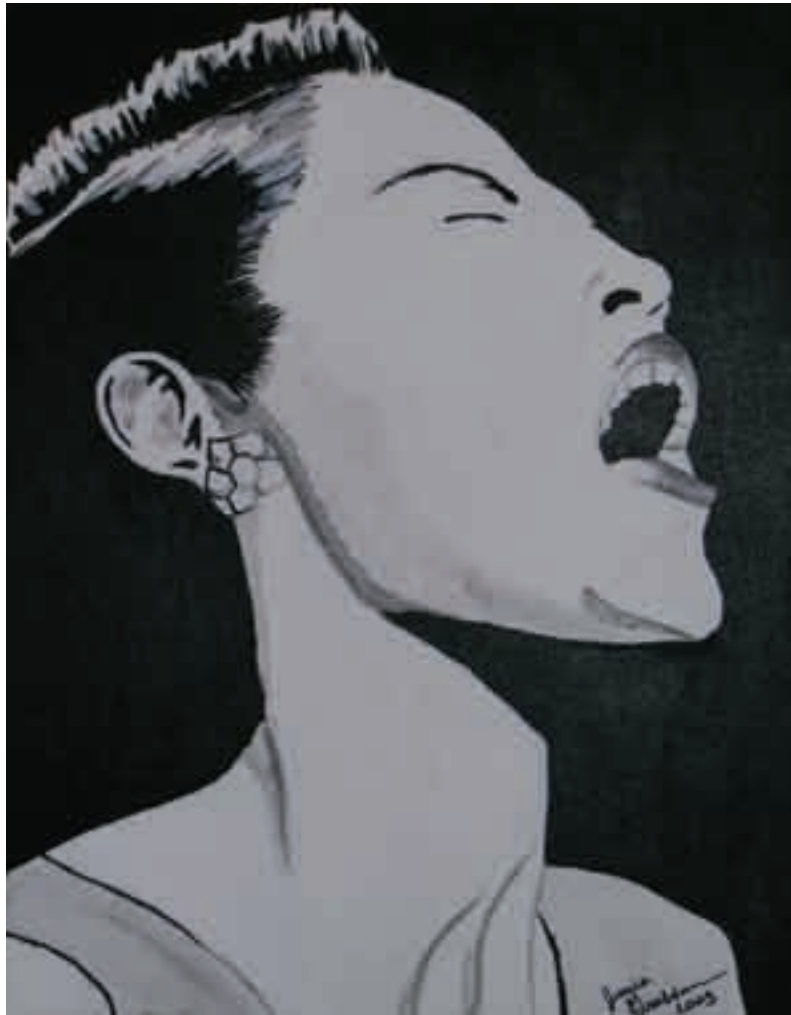
The hope of arts educators is that their efforts will result in a life-long awareness, appreciation and affection for all art forms for their students and, ideally, influence the choices they will make. Entrepreneur Craig Hall exemplifies a realization of artistic generosity.

He stepped forward to share his love of art with the citizens of Frisco by displaying his outstanding personal collection on the grounds of Hall Office Park as a free outdoor and indoor exhibit, the Texas Sculpture Garden.

Patricia Meadows, curator for the Texas Sculpture Garden and senior vice president of Hall Financial Group, considers Craig Hall’s collection to be educational as well as inspiring.

“When I pick out a piece of art, it has an educational component to it. My expertise is in regional artists – Texas artists. Usually people think Texas artists are all about cowboys, bronze steers and western themes. Nothing could father from the truth. We have the best contemporary artists working in this state.”

The collection does more than just uncover the complexity of Texas art; it also demonstrates the variety of styles and skills needed in the different mediums.



Billie Holliday, acrylic on canvas, by Jessica Grabham, 11th grade.

“When you do sculpture, you have metal, stone, glass, wood, clay, paper, photography, all kinds of things. Within those metal materials, you have bronze, steel, brass, and copper, and the metal could have patina work or be left raw. You might have art that tells a story, or art that is conceptual. Glass can be heat-fused and hand-blown. Art can be whimsical or it can be serious. We have five kinetic pieces and each demonstrates different way kinetics can work,” explains Meadows.

“The connecting thread is that all of our artists have been recognized in their areas, in the state or in the world,” Meadows continues, “there are no emerging artists in this collection.”

Part of Ms. Meadows’ consideration has to include the environmental impact to the outdoor sculptures as a result of the North Texas climate. “How will it respond to the heat? Texas is unrelenting in its treatment. It has to stand up to the elements. I never place [the outside installations] directly on the grass because of the corrosive impact of nature.”

The exhibit features “different artists from different cities,” says Ms. Meadows. “There needs to be a reason why we’re featuring the artist. Each is especially good at what they do and they have been hand-picked.”

“I was attracted to higher education for the collaboration between artists.”



photo provided by Hall Office Park

The primary difference between other curator positions and this one, says Ms. Meadow, is that the installations at the Texas Sculpture Garden are permanent as opposed to temporary installations in a gallery. “The art won’t move. At one time Mr. Hall and I talked about moving the art around, but that is hard on the art and expensive.”

Moreover, it wouldn’t be fair. “When the art feels right, the tenants get uncomfortable when it is moved. Some creative types enjoy the change, but most people get comfortable [with their environment],” Meadows says. “Change will be made by adding new pieces.”

The method of acquisition is flexible, as Ms. Meadows describes it. “There aren’t specific goals for acquisitions. Mr. Hall picks out sculptures and says ‘here, I’m sending art to you, find me a place for it.’ Sometimes I pick the art and the place for it before approaching him.” But Mr. Hall always approves each work.

The relationship between Ms. Meadows and the Halls began in 1995, when she was hired to work on another commercial building for them.

“When we first started working together, we went to shows to see what kind of art he liked. We have very similar tastes, but he is more edgy than I am. Usually it’s the other way around. It’s fun. If I show him six pieces of art, 99% of the time he picks out the one I’d chosen,” Meadows says.

Mr. Hall’s devotion to art in the work place is revolutionary, but Ms. Meadows is not surprised. “Having a visionary attitude is part of his persona. He doesn’t follow. He blazes the trail and others follow.”

M OVERS AND SHAKERS

Craig Hall’s contributions are visible, even from the highway. Other people work behind the scenes, looking for leadership roles and ways to strengthen the city’s commitment to the arts.

For Glendy Valdez, art is a way of life. “Throughout my life, I was inspired by my father, who was a professional graphic artist,” says Ms. Valdez, who is currently secretary for the Frisco Association for the Arts and founder of the Visual Arts Guild of Frisco. “But I was never pushed to pursue art as a career.”

Instead, visual art became for Ms. Valdez a source of comfort. “I’ve always taken workshops and I studied wood carving with Carl Bindhammer in Lucas, Texas for four years. And also I studied two years of painting with acrylics. I was doing the art for myself, not on a professional level with the aim to sell my work. Art was for pleasure, to unwind and a stress release.”

As she explored various styles, Ms. Valdez became increasingly focused on collage (which is flat, two-dimensional) and assemblage, which she describes as “3-D art with found objects.”

As the owner of Valdez Spice, a commercial spice blending operation which she started twenty-two years ago, Ms. Valdez is something of a practicing artist in her daily life. She becomes sensory descriptive when describing her “9 to 5” work. When blending her concoctions, Valdez describes looking at “color, granulation, size, and aroma, all in addition to flavor. When you work with some chefs, they expect you to create blends for them,” and therein lies the creativity.

Eight years ago, Ms. Valdez moved to Frisco, “for the peace and quiet, which I didn’t get,” she says with a laugh, and then adds a qualifying note. “But I love [Frisco’s] growth and potential, the exciting avenues for arts and sports, and the opportunities.”

photos provided by Hall Office Park



Looking to reestablish art in her schedule, Ms. Valdez put in a call to former mayor Kathy Seei. “I called and asked her about organizations. She directed me to the Frisco Association for the Arts, led by then-president Sonny Moyers.” Ms. Valdez became involved, but immediately realized that the organization functioned as an umbrella for the arts, and visual arts in Frisco were without immediate representation. With help from Gina Davis and Patricia Crain, she founded the Visual Arts Guild of Frisco in October 2001.

Ms. Valdez also serves on the Frisco Public Art Board, one of the newest city efforts to increase the arts enrichment in an accessible way.

“The City Council passed an ordinance that created the public art program,” says Amy Gill, assistant to the City Manager, “which refers to works of art that are available to the public and often integrated into the very architecture of the buildings. That’s why we are trying very hard to bring artists into the project early in the process.”

As Staff Liaison to the Frisco Public Art Board, Ms. Gill has been getting a crash course in visual art, and is enjoying every minute of it. “I don’t have an arts background and I feel like my world is opening up,” says Ms. Gill.

The approach for designing and implementing new projects is a three-tiered one, starting with an Artist Selection Committee that reviews submissions and makes recommendations to the Public Art Board, which in turn presents contract proposals to the City Council. Ms. Gill credits the arrangement with limiting bias in the program.

“The three-tiered approach takes the pressure off any one person and maximizes the public’s opinion. Having the public weigh in on the artistic choices is important to the board and the City Council, and the committee’s structure is designed to maximize community involvement,” says Ms. Gill.

“The Artist Selection Committee has designated different slots to get a good mix and a varied representation. The group selects the artist, reviews all of the maquettes (small scale representations of the artist’s intentions for the given project) and makes recommendations to the Public Art Board,” explains Ms. Gill.

“Having a *visionary attitude* is part of his *persona...he blazes the trail* and *others follow.*”



The Migration, oil pastels on paper, by Afton Rodriguez, 11th grade.

Sailboats, watercolor and crayon on paper, Jacob White, 4th grade. (below)

Those without extensive knowledge in the visual arts are encouraged to apply. “Anybody can apply to serve on the artists selection committee,” says Ms. Gill. “Theirs is an important perspective, a viewpoint just as valid.”

With a public art master plan ready to go in front of the City Council and a December completion date for the Public Works Complex, the Public Art Board is off to a running start. “In fact, we will have contracts for public art on the next City Council agenda,” says Ms. Gill.

The Public Works Complex, which will house the water and sewer departments, and street and fleet maintenance, will be the first project completed through the Public Art Board. The board is concurrently working on projects such as the Frisco Soccer and Entertainment Center and the Frisco Convention Center and is having an open call for artists to apply for future assignments. These include parks and hike-and-bike trails north of the first phase of the Preston Road Overlay’s development, the Recreation and Aquatics Center, police department and the Central Fire station.

Sheacy Thompson, the chair of the Public Art Board, finds the process compelling. “I am very excited. They have a wonderful committee set up to give recommendations and I think they’ve picked excellent artists. I am excited to see what they will create for the site.”

Not only is this Ms. Thompson’s first seat on an arts board, but she also recognizes the trail-blazing potential. “The board is newly created, so we are establishing the foundation,” she says.



Looking to the future, Ms. Thompson is optimistic. “In the short term, we will commission several artists and have a strong arts presence in the city. I’d like to see schools taking field trips to the arts sites, having tour groups to view the art. The board might have to do some fundraising to finance more projects.”

She refers to the Frisco Soccer and Entertainment Center. “People would like to see a whole lot of things in that large space. There are sixteen community fields. Since the location will attract national and international events, we will want to have art of high quality for an international audience. We want something to represent us well.”

The opinions of the citizens of Frisco are key. “I see the community coming together more in favor of art, like the Frisco Community Band and the Visual Arts Guild,” says Ms. Thompson. “They are emerging and performing. I see a growing interest. Frisco is very accessible. Everyone is open and people willing to do the work.”



Italian Mosaic
photo by Taylor Robinson, 8th grade.

THE BALANCING ACT

Often the artistic endeavors of our youth get lost in the pace of life as we enter the workforce and choose other avenues. Many people find ways to incorporate their passion for performance into their daily lives, and many people discover hidden talents in unexpected ways. The challenge becomes balancing artistic pursuits with work and family responsibilities.

Fortunately, many Frisco performing arts groups recognize their participants' life juggle, and try to accommodate by holding rehearsals in the evening and sometimes only once a week.

Brian Boring first discovered acting in 1995 at the McKinney Community Theater. The Director of Telecommunications for Collin County Community College for the last 17 years, Mr. Boring found himself being talked into an audition. "I had a friend that called and told me that he'd never been in a play and it was kind of a dare, an 'if you go and audition, then I'll go,'" says Mr. Boring, and he landed his first role in the Halloween production of Dracula.

"I was cast as 'Renfield' because I was so nervous," says Mr. Boring, who also admits to an ulterior motive for pursuing theater. "I was single at the time and I got into it to meet girls."

Once in rehearsal, he found another benefit. "I continued because I found it to be helpful with public speaking. I was extremely shy and it was good therapy," Boring says.

He found an immediate application of his newfound confidence. "I'm often called to present proposals in front of higher administrations, to speak in front of people and to give a technical overview of communications overall. I used to have anxiety to stand in front of people. [Theater has] helped me alleviate that anxiety."

The experience of live theater has left a lasting impression on Mr. Boring. "My favorite part was Renfield--being a nervous, anxious person, no matter what you did, it fit."

Mr. Boring enjoys comedy, "I like to make people laugh," and he enjoys the fellowship of the Frisco Community Theater scene. "There is a lot of talent in Collin County, so the competition can get tough," he says. For prospective actors, he offers some advice.

"I recommend auditioning for a small part, just going for a small speaking role, and to watch and observe. Learning from others is what it's all about."

*Untitled, acrylic on paper,
by Kelsey Hendrix, 11th grade.*



On occasion, it's a chance find that which sparks the imagination. Like the students of Frisco ISD, Scott Sterrantino was exposed to music in his youth, and played alto saxophone in the band until he was graduated from high school and came to Texas A&M in pursuit of an engineering degree.

"I didn't want to join because I wanted to focus on my engineering degree," says Mr. Sterrantino, "and I just stopped playing."

"I had no idea what was out there. Then I saw information on the website in January about the Frisco Community Band." The newly formed band was gearing up for its first meeting in February of this year and Mr. Sterrantino found himself at the inception of the organization.

"I hadn't played in ten years, but JD Smith (president and chairman of the board) said, 'Just come play again,'" says Sterrantino.

"No pressure, no stress, all fun," says Mr. Sterrantino. "And the only requirement is to have at least high school band experience." The band rehearses on Tuesday evenings at Frisco High School, under the "excellent" direction of Dr. Daryl Trent. "He's been really good at dealing with people who haven't played in years," says Mr. Sterrantino of Dr. Trent, who directs the Frisco High School band.

For Mr. Sterrantino, it's more than just fun. "I'm glad I got my degree, but the one thing I really regretted is that I didn't get to play. I'm a technical guy, but this is a release for me."

Bob Kenyon found himself onstage for the first time two years ago, when Collin County Ballet Theater director Kirt Hathaway found him "hanging around" and said, "Do you want to do this?" "This" was joining his daughters onstage in the Nutcracker as a "Party Dad."

"Being on stage, acting, while your daughter is on stage was thrilling," says Mr. Kenyon. "I wagged my finger with great disgust at that naughty Fritz," he says with a laugh, as his daughter Lynsey portrayed the mischievous character.

Now he's finding his creative side by taking up the violin and performing character roles for the ballet troupe.

***"The hope of
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awareness..."***



photo provided by 5 Degreez of Dance

"I guess I'm just a ham that's been repressed," declared Kenyon.

Kimberly Bland discovered her passion for dance at an age when most professional dancers are well into their careers.

After college, Kimberly landed in Dallas teaching ESL classes at Brookhaven College, and decided to jump on the opportunity to study dance. The love was instantaneous, and Kimberly aggressively pursued summer training at the acclaimed North Carolina School of the Arts and the American Dance Festival, where she took master classes with Pilobolus.

"I'm in love with movement and expression through dance, and for me, modern dance was more in the scope of my particular vision," says Ms. Bland.

Once in Frisco, Ms. Bland sought out dance teaching opportunities, and found Frisco Dance Force. "I walked into the studio to apply to teach, and I met Debra [Montalvo Swaim, owner of Frisco Dance Force] and she told me about her company."

5 Degreez of Danze was the only modern dance company in Frisco and they were just about to hold auditions. "It was fortunate timing," she says.

In addition to performing with the company since 2002, Ms. Bland is now venturing off into choreography. Her first work for the company, "Stained Glass Sonata," will premiere at their fall concert.

She describes the work as "a collection of short pieces of music that I've brought together with the feeling of walking into a cathedral, being confronted with the beauty of the stained glass, seeing its nuances and then back to the grand sweep of things."

"I choreograph knowing the mood and feel I want to create. It's almost like I'm sculpting, until I see that movement and then I move onto the next phrase," Bland explains.

Ms. Bland describes her other professional career in artistic terms. A health concern of her own led her to CranioSacral therapy, and she opened her own practice, Health Renaissance, last July. "CranioSacral therapy is somewhat an art in and of itself. I was impressed by how non-invasive it was, and thought it would be an ideal pursuit. And my dance background inspired me to incorporate stretching into the sessions."

When searching for an office, Ms. Bland knew her criterion was built around her burgeoning dance vocation. "I was looking for the proximity first. I wanted to be near the dance studio," says Ms. Bland, who found Hall Office Park to be the ideal setting. "It works out perfectly because studio and office are so close. As an artist, environment is very important to me."

Opportunities in the arts abound in Frisco for adults and children. Consider rekindling a past interest in music or introduce your children to dance. It is the first step in developing a life-long passion for the arts.

Dana Gavin Frank is a freelance writer living in Dallas.