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SCHOOL DAYS

Five lucky students from Loma Linda Elementary will begin free ballet classes this month as part of Convergence Ballet Co.'s PLIES program. They will receive free tights, leotards and shoes, thanks to community sponsors (photo courtesy of Convergence Ballet Co.).

Loma Linda dancers bloom in ballet classes

By Teri Carnicelli

A partnership between Loma Linda Elementary and North Central-based dance company, Convergence Ballet, is entering its third year this month. Five lucky students will be selected to participate in a free after-school ballet class throughout the school year.

The program is called PLIES, or "Providing Leaps In Elementary Schools." Jennifer Cafarella, artistic director for the nonprofit Convergence Ballet Co., says that after a short presentation at the school, students are given permission slips to bring home in order to "audition" for the five coveted spots.

Most of the families wouldn't have the funds to pay for ballet class, she said. Not only are the classes free, the shoes, tights, leotards and more are paid for by sponsors. Each student has their own cubbyhole to store their gear at the ballet company's home at 2326 E. Indian School Road. The students come two days a week, and spend 30 minutes on "conditioning" and 1.5 hours for ballet class.

The school district, for its part, has made the ballet company an official stop for the school bus on that route so that the children don't have to worry about how they will get there after school—often when parents or caregivers are still at work. The school is just a short distance away at 2002 E. Clarendon Ave.

During the year, the student dancers get to perform in two of Convergence Ballet's productions: its spring recital, and the holiday favorite, "The Nutcracker." Each student receives two complimentary tickets to each show so that loved ones can attend.

Students who have participated in the first two years of the program also are invited to continue on, if they so choose, again paid for from sponsorships. But since the program is now entering its third year, those sponsorship dollars are starting to be stretched thin, Cafarella admits.

So she's asking members of the community who'd like to chip in to help these students continue receiving free ballet classes to contact her at 602-957-3364 or info@convergenceballet.org. "Every dollar helps," she says. "But the most important thing is how incredible these kids really area, and how much you see them change from the beginning of the program to the end. They just bloom."

School Briefs

GLENDALE UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Shively named an Administrator of Year

Glendale Union High School District Director of Career and Technical Education Amanda Shively is once again being recognized for her achievements.

Arizona DECA recently named her the 2019 Administrator of the Year. Shively was honored at the DECA International Career Development Conference in April.